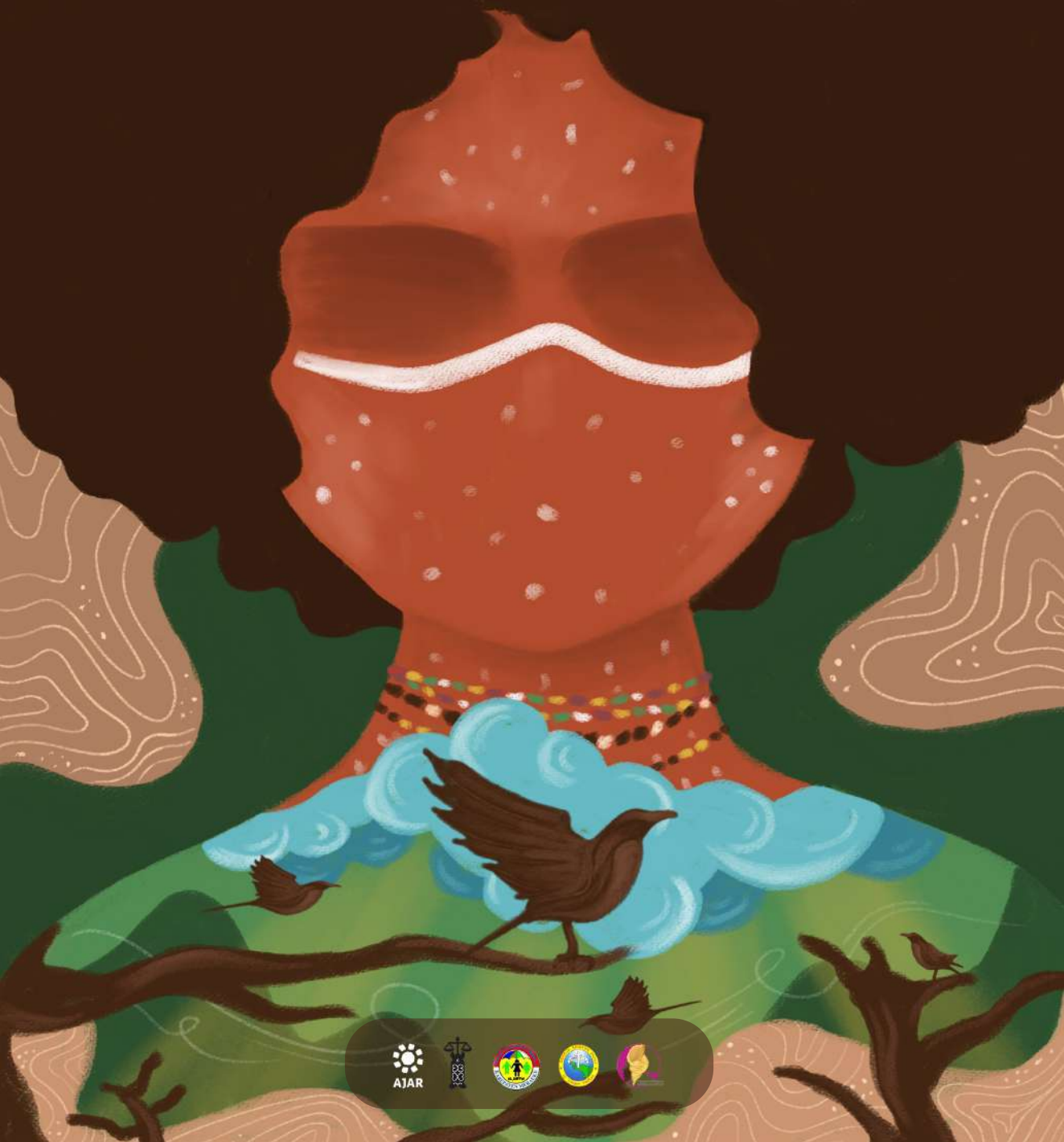


# All the Birds are Gone :

Indigenous Women Speak Out Against Forest Loss in Papua





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March 2021



## **All the Birds are Gone: Indigenous Women Speak Out Against Forest Loss in Papua**

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This book is dedicated to Olga Hamadi (1982–2016), Ferry Marisan (1971–2019) and Yuliana (Ully) Yabansabra (1985–2020) who dedicated their lives to defending and empowering women survivors in Papua. Three bright stars; the nights are darker without you.

# Who We Are

**Papuan Women's Working Group (PWG)** is an informal group formed in 2013 as an initiative of AJAR, The Institute for Human Rights Studies and Advocacy Papua (Elsham Papua), the Women's Advocacy Institute (eL AdPPer), The Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Section of the Evangelical Christian Church of Papua (KPKC GKITP), the Merauke Archdiocese Secretary for Peace and Justice (SKP KAM), The Belantara Papua Foundation, the Humi Imane Foundation as well as individuals who are committed to the protection of women's rights in Papua. For this process of participatory research, PWG also worked alongside the Kaki Abu Legal Aid Institute (LBH Kaki Abu).

PWG's goals are to, 1) strengthen the voices of women who are survivors of violence; 2) formulate action in the fight against impunity; 3) build an understanding of the socio-economic issues and impacts of violence experienced by indigenous women. Since its formation, PWG has worked with AJAR on a number of participatory research projects aimed at fulfilling and protecting of women's rights in Papua.

**Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR)** is a non-profit organization based in Jakarta, Indonesia. AJAR's mission is to increase the capacity of local and national actors, particularly victim's organizations, in the fight against entrenched impunity, and contribute to building cultures based on accountability, justice and a willingness to learn from the root causes of mass human rights violations in Asia. AJAR's work focuses on conflict transformation, human rights, education and building solidarity throughout the Asia-Pacific region. For further information, please follow the link: <http://asia-ajar.org/>



# Executive Summary

*I still have my nature [traditional land], but the police always come to hunt. We put up a signpost to forbid them, but the police threw the sign away. In the afternoons there still used to be deer. But now there are none, all the birds are gone.* – KS, Kebar Valley, February 2020

Between November 2019 and February 2020, Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) and the Papuan Women’s Working Group (PWG) conducted participatory research in five locations across the provinces of Papua and West Papua,<sup>1</sup> involving 100 indigenous Papuan women. The research focused on the impact of land grabbing and forest loss, and how indigenous women are coping and resisting these threats to their natural resources and survival. AJAR and PWG believe that despite the many groups working on conservation and indigenous people’s rights to natural resources, the voices of Papuan women were still unheard. Using participatory tools, we forged a way to listen to and amplify the voices of indigenous Papuan women whose forests are under threat or have already been lost.

As the twenty-year period of Special Autonomy for Papua (Law No 21/2001) draws to a close, tensions on a way forward are increasing. While many Papuans view Special Autonomy as a failure that must be replaced by concrete steps toward political self-determination, a more moderate view is that the law’s expiry provides an opportunity to renegotiate autonomy and make real promises for a better future for Papuans. Most likely, the

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<sup>1</sup> In this book, we use the word Papua as shorthand to indicate both Papua and West Papua provinces.

national government will compromise by extending the current law without seriously re-evaluating or improving its implementation. But now Papuan women, left out of initial negotiations, are speaking out on the law's negative impact, and are calling for an assessment of patterns of racism, sexism, and gender-based violence that significantly increased under Special Autonomy. Based on in-depth discussions with 100 indigenous Papuan women, we found the following:

- **Plantation expansion:** Papuan forests are the new frontier for the expansion of plantation commodities, mostly produced for export. Roughly one million hectares of forest have been converted to commercial plantations, with many thousands more in the planning stages. In particular, the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, or MIFEE, has targeted 2.5 million hectares of forest for plantations, mainly for oil palm and pulpwood. As recently as September 2020, President Widodo announced his vision for an additional 4.6 million hectares of rice in Papua as part of an expanded “Food Estate” program.
- **Loss of traditional land and food security:** Vast areas of plantation have been established by clearing forests under indigenous claim. This often occurs without the consent of, or fair compensation to, indigenous landowners, or is not in compliance with agreements made with communities to provide benefits, thereby violating Indonesian regulations. Meanwhile, locals bear the incalculable loss of their land and forests, essential to maintaining their identities and traditional livelihoods.
- **In-migration and demographic shifts:** Plantation expansion has brought a surge of in-migration, both spontaneous and organized, as Indonesians from other islands provide labor for both hybrid industrial and small-holder schemes. Rising migrant populations have generated religious tensions and frequent racism, with an increase in inter-ethnic conflict. Papuans feel excluded from employment and educational opportunities that come at the same time that development funds intended to improve their welfare have increased.
- **Inter-clan conflict:** Since the enactment of Special Autonomy, Papua has been divided into two provinces, 32 regencies, and hundreds of new



districts which has driven competition for political power and authority over revenues from natural resources. Competition related to these new jurisdictions (known as *pemekaran*), that often align with different Papuan clans, disagreements over traditional territorial boundaries, and the sale of community-claimed land to plantations have increased inter-clan conflict.

- **Corruption:** While Special Autonomy has not delivered on its promises for greater political freedoms and decision-making for Papuans, it has produced a massive influx in revenue from natural resources and “special autonomy funds” (*dana otsus*). Regency governments were unprepared to effectively allocate this funding, with no institutional support for budget management or procurement processes, and no transparency or effective anti-corruption measures in place. As a result, a large proportion of these funds were poorly spent or lost to corruption. However, the funds do serve as an effective means for national interest to co-opt members of the Papua (male) political elite.
- **Increasing militarization:** Far from reducing conflict, the military has continued its heavy presence under autonomy, in part to protect the expanding natural resource extractions as “national assets”. Many MIFEE concessions are located close to the border with Papua New Guinea, creating additional military concerns. In addition, individual military officers personally benefit from resource enterprises. Communities have documented the involvement of military and police as security for MIFEE plantations that intimidate communities, punish resistance to land grabs, and co-opt local leadership in the land acquisition process.

## Disproportionate burden from Special Autonomy on vulnerable indigenous women

Prior to autonomy, indigenous women were already vulnerable due to their weak status in traditional (*adat*) society. Women are often blocked from participating in *adat* institutions, have few or no rights to land, are forced into underage marriage, are prevented from educational opportunities, and

suffer economic marginalization with no access to skilled employment or the cash economy. Special Autonomy has increased indigenous women's vulnerability due not only to the loss of traditional lands to the expanding plantation sector, but also to other changes that put them at risk, including:

- **Lack of land rights, participation, compensation:** Indigenous Papuan women reported that companies replicate the discrimination of *adat* institutions by excluding indigenous women from negotiations, denying them due compensation and benefit-sharing, by paying (if at all) clan leaders or male relatives instead. Jobs and other benefits, like scholarships or educational opportunities, are monopolized by male clan members. Often companies isolate clan leaders from their communities in order to make non-transparent deals.
- **Forest dependence:** At the same time, indigenous women are most dependent on forests for their livelihoods, so they feel the loss most acutely. It is women who provide food for their families and suffer when they lose access to land for farming or to forests for collecting staples like sago and other traditional foods. Five of 100 women respondents relied exclusively on their gardens for subsistence while a further 85 relied on forest gardens supplemented with employment, assistance from family members or a combination of the two.
- **Increased demands of household labor:** Indigenous women suffer from increased demands related to household labor when male family members take wage-labor jobs on plantations. The loss of land and forest also means women must travel farther to farm and collect forest products and drinking water.
- **Male access to cash:** Meanwhile men have monopolized access to the influx of cash from wage labor, development projects, and land sales. Women report that men's increased access to cash, coupled with women's loss of traditional livelihoods, has soured family relationships, led to alcohol abuse, and increased domestic violence.
- **Violence Against Women:** Women are at increased risk of gender-based violence from the migrant community, from the military, and from private security forces. Of the 100 women who participated in this research,

49 have experienced violence. This includes domestic violence (23 participants) as well as violence between community members outside the home (7), and violence perpetrated by state actors or security personnel from the companies (19).

## Indigenous Papuan women's rights and traditional forests under siege

Listening to the stories of 100 women, we affirmed that indigenous Papuan women depend on customary forests, not only for their livelihoods, but also for their cultural and spiritual identity. Yet women are often blocked from participating in decisions about the forests they depend on by the government, by plantation companies, and by their own customary (*adat*) institutions. Often, Papuan women do not receive compensation when their lands are sold or benefit from services provided by extractive industries. This leaves them even more vulnerable, suffering the heaviest burdens from the negative environmental and social impacts of the expansion of plantations, and the changes those plantations bring to Papuan life and society.

**Indigenous people in Indonesian society:** The provision of government education, health, and infrastructure services are severely lacking for rural Papuan communities, many of whom as a result live in poverty. The increase in migration has worsened this situation, as indigenous Papuans are out-competed for education and employment opportunities, while racism and religious discrimination further marginalizes them. Although *adat* community rights are enshrined in Indonesia's Constitution, both national and local governments fail to adequately protect these rights, and regularly issue concessions to companies for the use of traditional lands. Governments fail to enforce their own regulations on indigenous peoples' rights to traditional forests, denying them a say in how their lands are managed, their rights to fair compensation for the loss of their land, or even their access to community development benefits.

**Women and *adat*:** Women have little voice or ability to participate in *adat* institutions. They have less access to education than men, as they are

expected to work in the home and care for aging parents. 34 participants had either no schooling or only primary education, while only 19 reached senior high school.

School-age girls, because of economic circumstances, are often forced into marriage by their parents, missing out on education opportunities. Out of 100 informants, 13 women were married between the ages of 16 and 18, while eight were married before their sixteenth birthday. Lack of education means women have less ability to acquire skills for higher paying employment, leaving them dependent on agriculture and the forests for their livelihoods.

**Lack of land rights:** Papuan women often only have the right to farm, but not to own land. Their rights to inherit land are trumped by those of their male siblings or descendants. In clans where women can own land, research findings show their rights are often ignored, and men make decisions regarding women's land without consulting or compensating them. Women are often blocked from participating in discussions about traditional land and territorial boundaries, limiting their effectiveness to participate in community discussions. They become even more disempowered when they marry and move to their husband's community, where they have no rights, and are even more vulnerable when they are widowed.

**Bad faith bargaining by companies:** Over the last decade, there has been a rapid expansion of plantations, often converting forests under customary claim to monoculture. Women reported that companies act in bad faith by isolating and co-opting clan leaders to make land deals on behalf of their communities, excluding the rightful landowners, especially women, from any compensation. In some cases, companies make small "good faith" payments up front, and use the receipts of these payments to indicate the community's consent to land acquisition, without further compensation or negotiation. Companies frequently do not fulfil agreements to provide benefits or services and, when benefits are provided, women are often shut out, for example from employment opportunities or school scholarships which are given exclusively to male applicants.

## *Glimmers of hope?*

Through this dark history of marginalization and exploitation of Papua's people and her natural landscape, there are still glimmers of hope. Admittedly, these small steps forward are often followed by backlash and the recentralization of government authority. However, there remain seeds of strength and tools for resistance that Papuan women can use in the ongoing struggle for their rights, dignity and prosperity.

One such seed for hope has been the 2012 decision of the national Constitutional Court (35/PUU-X/2012), which recognized the rights and authority of customary (*adat*) communities over their ancestral territories, as granted under the Constitution. This decision clearly stated that “customary forest is not state forest” (*hutan adat bukan hutan negara*), thereby reaffirming that customary rights indeed constitute “ownership”. This recognition of customary ownership means that these areas therefore cannot be subsumed into the sole authority of the State, which is properly only over land that is “unowned”.

Stemming from this court decision, there has been a flurry of local regulations (*Perdasus*) by the Papuan provincial parliaments (*DPRP* and *DPRPB*) for the protections of *adat* land and of precious ecosystems against development by natural resource industry.<sup>2</sup> For example, a provincial bill (No. 22/2008) was passed requiring the recognition of indigenous community rights and the participatory mapping of their traditional territories, and mandating resource industries profiting from *adat* land to share 30% of those benefits with the local communities.<sup>3</sup>

However, indigenous Papuan women still struggle to be involved in these processes at a local and national-level. In the meantime, across the five areas of our research, the social and environmental impact of large-scale land acquisition has been severe: frequent floods, water shortages and pollution, food insecurity, the loss of flora, fauna and livelihood, as well as the erosion

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the Regencies of Sorong, Teluk Bentuni, and Tambrau have passed such regulations recognizing and protecting indigenous communities (see [www.aman.or.id](http://www.aman.or.id) for copies of these regulations).

<sup>3</sup> <[peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/125350/perdasus-papua-no-22-tahun-2008](http://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/125350/perdasus-papua-no-22-tahun-2008)>.

of traditional knowledge and cultural meaning. The survival of the indigenous way of life is at stake as well as the environmental health of the community.

Our research found that indigenous women in Papua are the protectors and the keepers of the forest. It is their task to bring food and water to the table. They are the holders of knowledge about the medicinal properties of plants and the significant cultural sites for their communities. But in many cases, they are left out of negotiations around natural resources — their voices left unheard. Through this research, we have documented how development projects, given permits by the central government and facilitated by local authorities without regard for local communities and local impacts, have devastated a way of life that for generations has sustained communities and local environments. These projects enriched a few and impoverish many. Indigenous people, and women in particular, have not enjoyed the promised development benefits that were promised in exchange for loss of their land and forests.

Our time with the women in these communities has demonstrated clearly that Papua is not “empty land” and the women who live in and depend on these precious forests have rights—both as indigenous people and as citizens. As we conclude our research, we are even more convinced of the urgency to listen to the voices of indigenous women as they demand that their rights and their humanity be recognized: their rights of traditional land ownership and to practice their traditional livelihoods, to food security, to be consulted in the use of the land and be compensated when they consent to its use, to participate in their own indigenous institutions, to have equal access to government health and education services, to have political voice, to be protected from violence, and to live with dignity.

Our Starting Point







A group of women prepare sago.  
Photo by Albertus Vembrianto.





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1

# Back to The Garden – an Introduction



*Ebi nyek, ebi swor, ebi nii mangga ma yek ki efun du.*

Land and forest are our dignity and our life – Mpur Women's Statement  
(February 2020)

At the end of a year-long effort documenting the experiences of Papuan women facing violence, Mientje Rumbiak, a member of the Papuan Women's Working Group or PWG, made a profound comment:

*The gardens that Papuan women plant and care for are the source of life for their families. This is where indigenous strength and wisdom pass to the next generation. Various tribes have given this garden different names. We have to go back to the garden, to the place where Papuan women plant hope – manage and process food, collect medicines to heal pain, talk with family and friends – the foundation of Papuan women's identity. It is in this garden where the source of women's strength can be found. When we dream of achieving justice, we must go back to our gardens, the source of life for Papuan women.*

Our efforts for greater justice in Papua began by connecting with how Papuan women experience land conflict, while playing a leading role protecting and nurturing their natural resources.

We began by reviewing the work of non-government organizations that have documented rampant destruction of the Papuan environmental landscape, wildlife, and forests as well as the deep impact this has had on the cultural practices of indigenous peoples. Indigenous land rights are routinely ignored during the establishment of plantations and mining sites. From PWG's experience in the field, we knew that many local communities lack the knowledge and power to deal effectively with these challenges and the voices of women are invariably marginalized from the process. Although a small number of indigenous groups have successfully resisted plans to convert large tracts of land into plantations, many more indigenous communities have experienced a series of injustices, corruption and loss of their land and natural resources. The scale of land acquisition and conversion in Papua is massive. Civil society organizations have documented at least 21 plantations

involved in the deforestation of 2.6 million hectares of land,<sup>1</sup> resulting in the large-scale rapid destruction of the natural environment in Papua.<sup>2</sup>

However, there are still significant gaps in knowledge regarding the impact of large-scale land acquisitions on indigenous Papuan communities and, in particular, the impact on women in these communities. Thus, AJAR and PWG undertook to conduct participatory action research to document women's experiences and opinions to address this gap.

We conceived this research project to listen and support indigenous women who are dealing with large-scale land acquisitions in Papua. We wanted to strengthen the capacity of indigenous women and their communities to understand and articulate the root causes and impact of large-scale land acquisitions through participatory action research, producing practical knowledge to assist them to advocate for change. We also developed tools and learning materials for indigenous women and their communities that will assist them in advocating for their rights and understanding existing local and national mechanisms for protection of their land rights. Our report heroes the voices of the indigenous women who participated in our action research, preserving their experiences and analysis in their own words.

## Organizing research: overcoming civil unrest and pandemic lockdown

We began preparations for research in March 2019. However, by August, large-scale protests had broken out across Papua, triggered by an incident in Surabaya, where a group of security forces and angry civilians gathered in front of a dormitory for Papuan students, hurling racist epithets and accusing them of disrespecting the Indonesian flag.<sup>3</sup> The accusation was never proven, but a video of the racist remarks spread over the internet,

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<sup>1</sup> "Atlas Sawit Papua: Dibawah kendali penguasa modal," *Awes MIFEE*, 30 April 2015, <https://awasmiffee.potager.org/?p=1205&lang=id>

<sup>2</sup> S. Chao and R. Smolker, "West Papua: Depths of Loss and Heights of Resistance," *Forest Cover*, no. 62 (2020), 10-11. <https://globalforestcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/forestcover-62-EN.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <[www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49434277](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49434277)>; also <[jakartaglobe.id/context/alleged-instigator-apologizes-for-racist-actions-against-papuan-students-in-surabaya](http://jakartaglobe.id/context/alleged-instigator-apologizes-for-racist-actions-against-papuan-students-in-surabaya)> .

igniting anger among Papuans, both inside and outside Papua. The lack of an appropriate response from the government triggered anti-racism protests across Papua. In some areas, the protests turned violent with several buildings and public facilities torched. In response, the national government sent thousands of security personnel to Papua, detaining hundreds of protesters, and imposing a month-long internet blackout across Papua. More than 60 people were charged with treason, while others were charged for raising their voices against racism, four of whom were women.<sup>4</sup>

As tensions subsided, PWG members gathered to finalize the research design. Bringing together eight indigenous women and one indigenous man from four communities affected by land grabbing, we conducted a mapping of the pressing human rights issues and natural resource conflicts. This was followed by a week-long training session on facilitation skills in order to conduct community-level research.

From November 2019 to February 2020, PWG members organized community workshops with local leaders and women in all five research areas, involving a total of 100 women. A videographer took part in these visits and workshops to document key moments and conduct follow-up interviews. AJAR held face-to-face meetings to consolidate materials gathered during fieldwork just days before the world came to a stand-still due to the threat of the Corona virus.

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<sup>4</sup> In May 2020, five detainees were convicted and released, including one woman, Ariana Elopere, having served their sentence of nine months, “Papuan Activists Rejoice after Completing Prison Sentences for Treason,” <[www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/05/28/papuan-activists-rejoice-after-completing-prison-sentences-for-treason.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/05/28/papuan-activists-rejoice-after-completing-prison-sentences-for-treason.html)>. In June 2020, the courts convicted another 7 Papuan men with ‘treason’ with possible jail time of 17 years, “Seven Papuan Activists Convicted of Treason after Anti-Racism Protests,” <[www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/17/seven-papuan-activists-convicted-of-treason-after-anti-racism-protests](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/17/seven-papuan-activists-convicted-of-treason-after-anti-racism-protests)>. In Manokwari, former local councilor member (DPD), Sayang Mandabayan, was also arrested in September 2019 but has since been released in June 2020. The third woman, Hermina Elopere from Sorong, was arrested in September 2019 after being accused of destroying the Sorong City Local Parliament Building. She was sentenced to 10 months in prison and released in July 2020, <[suarapapua.com/2020/07/03/empat-korban-rasisme-bebas-dari-lapas-kota-sorong/](http://suarapapua.com/2020/07/03/empat-korban-rasisme-bebas-dari-lapas-kota-sorong/)>. Perempuan. The fourth woman, Melfin Wefete, was also arrested in Sorong. A short description of their cases are listed in Human Rights Watch list of political prisoners: <[www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/04/list-known-political-prisoners-indonesia](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/04/list-known-political-prisoners-indonesia)> and in Annex 4 of TAPOL’s 2020 report, “The 2019 West Papua Uprising: Protests against Racism and for Self-Determination,” <[www.freewestpapua.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/The-2019-West-Papua-Uprising.pdf](http://www.freewestpapua.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/The-2019-West-Papua-Uprising.pdf)>.

Since the pandemic, we have had to conclude the research by distance, creating ‘remote teams’ to sort through transcripts and field notes, convene meetings by Zoom, write various drafts, and produce final results. As we completed writing up key research findings, there were further demonstrations, arrests, and killings in various parts of Papua.<sup>5</sup> Sadly, we have had to learn to adapt to the ebb and flow of conflict, along with the threat of contagion.

The following book is composed of three sections. **‘Our Starting Point’** provides a historical backdrop, describes the goals and approach to this research, and includes an analysis of the global and national political economy of extractive industries and their impact on Papua. Particular attention is given to the legacies of authoritarianism, the failures of Papua’s ‘Special Autonomy’, and the global commodity markets that accelerate land grabbing and environmental degradation across Papua.

The next section, **‘Listening to Indigenous Women’s Voices’**, consists of five case studies on the areas where we conducted our participatory research. Three locations are in the Province of Papua and include Boven Digoel Regency, Unurum Guay in Jayapura Regency and Kebar in Tambrau Regency. The remaining two locations are in the Province of West Papua. These are the Regency of Sorong and Tomage which is located in Fakfak Regency. In these five chapters, we document the authentic voices of the indigenous Papuan women facing the threat or the impact of forest loss.

In the final section, **‘Our Findings and A Way Forward’**, we present an alternative view based on a philosophy of land shared by PWG members and the Papuan women involved in this research, along with our key findings and recommendations. We envision an approach to development that begins with an inhabited land, not empty land, where we pursue the well-being of indigenous people. We return to the view held by indigenous women that the land, forests, and humans are inseparable, that human survival and the sustainability of forest are one of the same.

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<sup>5</sup> UN human rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani mentioned some of these incidents in her comments on Papua dated 30 November 2020, <[www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26551&LangID=E](http://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26551&LangID=E)>.





Destruction caused by land clearing for palm oil in Boven Digoel.  
Photo by Albertus Vembrianto.





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# A Field of Thorns: Special Autonomy and Indigenous Women in Papua

*The president has spoiled the men with the Special Autonomy money; they all run to the city to get drunk. Women now wear shorts and do all the work.* – MM, Jayawijaya Regency (I am Here, 2019)

As the twenty-year period of Special Autonomy for Papua (Law No 21/2001) draws to a close, tensions on a way forward are increasing. While many Papuans view Special Autonomy as a failure that must be replaced by concrete steps toward political self-determination, a more moderate view is that the law's expiry provides an opportunity to renegotiate autonomy and make real promises for a better future for Papuans. Most likely, the national government will compromise by extending the current law without seriously re-evaluating or improving its implementation.<sup>1</sup> Papuan women have spoken out on the gender-blind implementation of various Special Autonomy programs, calling for a reflection on patterns of racism and violence.<sup>2</sup>

The Institute for Policy Analysis on Conflict or IPAC, a Jakarta-based policy research organization, proposed that, “a new law could be an opportunity for creative new ideas on land, migration, governance, security, anti-discrimination measures, human rights, and power-sharing. It could become a chance to revisit and improve some articles of the original law that were never implemented – for example, the provision for local political parties. It could be an opportunity for a serious debate over what genuine autonomy might look like.”<sup>3</sup> PWG believes Papuan women must play a central role in this debate on Papua's future. Papuan women have long been marginalized from decisions which impact women.

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<sup>1</sup> CNN Indonesia, “Mahfud: Otsus Papua Tetap Berlaku, Dana Diperpanjang,” <[www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200911133219-32-545336/mahfud-otsus-papua-tetap-berlaku-dana-diperpanjang](http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200911133219-32-545336/mahfud-otsus-papua-tetap-berlaku-dana-diperpanjang)>

<sup>2</sup> The Jakarta Post, “Prolonged conflict, inequality create ‘layers of violence’ against women in Papua,” <[www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/07/28/prolonged-conflict-inequality-create-layers-of-violence-against-women-in-papua.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/07/28/prolonged-conflict-inequality-create-layers-of-violence-against-women-in-papua.html)>.

<sup>3</sup> “Renewing, Revising or Rejecting Special Autonomy in Papua,” Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) Report No. 64 (30 July 2020), <[file.understandingconflict.org/file/2020/07/Report\\_64\\_Papua.pdf](http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2020/07/Report_64_Papua.pdf)>.



Two decades ago, Special Autonomy was granted to the province in response to heightened political unrest and demands for independence. During the Suharto regime (1966-1998), countless human rights violations were carried out in the name of stability and development.<sup>4</sup> At the start of Indonesia's *Reformasi* (1998), the Upper House of Parliament (MPR) made a resolution calling for a 'just solution' to the protracted conflicts in Aceh, Irian Jaya (now Papua), and Moluccas, by establishing "a legal system that guarantees the supremacy of the rule of law and human rights based on justice and truth." [TAP MPR IV 1999]. The following year, the MPR issued another resolution calling for the establishment of a "National Truth and Reconciliation Commission as an extra-judicial institution ... tasked with upholding the truth by exposing past abuses of power and past human rights violations ... carrying out reconciliation in the perspective of the common interest as a nation."

### A potted history of Papua<sup>5</sup>

Current tensions in Papua are connected to past struggles for decolonization. When the Netherlands recognized Indonesia's independence in 1949, the status of the Papuan territory remained unresolved.<sup>6</sup> In negotiations, the Netherlands and Indonesia agreed to postpone a resolution. However, disagreement over the territory was prolonged, featuring in discussions of the UN General Assembly from 1954 to 1961, when Indonesia laid claim to the territory.<sup>7</sup>

During the Cold War, the U.S. feared the Soviet Union's influence in the Asia Pacific region and urged the Dutch to reach a negotiated settlement with Indonesia. Under the 1962 New York Agreement, the territory was to be transferred to

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<sup>4</sup> See ICTJ and ELSHAM Papua, 2012, "The Past That Has Not Passed: Human Rights Violations in Papua Before and After *Reformasi*," <[www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-ELSHAM-Indonesia-Papua-2012-English.pdf](http://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-ELSHAM-Indonesia-Papua-2012-English.pdf)>.

<sup>5</sup> Excerpt from "I am Here" Report, with new information on women's lack of participation in the Act of Free Choice.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Security Force/UNSF Background, 1-8, <[peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/unsfbackgr.html](http://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/unsfbackgr.html)>.

<sup>7</sup> ICTJ and ELSHAM Papua.

the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority known as UNTEA. The agreement required that an “Act of Free Choice” be held by 1969, affirming the “eligibility of all adults, male and female, not foreign nationals, to participate in the act of self-determination to be carried out in accordance with international practice.”<sup>8</sup> On 1 May 1963, UNTEA transferred authority over the territory to Indonesia. In the lead-up to the scheduled referendum, many Papuan leaders were detained, tortured, exiled, or even killed, as Indonesian forces attempted to suppress efforts to organize support around the issue of self-determination.<sup>9</sup> Indonesian authorities persuaded UN officials to agree to a vote in which only 1,025 individuals were selected to represent the people of Papua. Those few representatives unanimously voted in favor of Papua to be under Indonesian sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> The territory was renamed West Irian (later changed to Irian Jaya in 1973), becoming the country’s 26th province. PWG recently analyzed a list of the 1,025 individuals thought to have participated in the Act of Free Choice.<sup>11</sup> We found that only 7% were women, i.e. out of a list of 1,025 names, only 80 were women, illustrating how Papuan women have always been sidelined in decision-making about their own future.

During the New Order era, Papua was designated a “military operations zone”, along with Aceh and East Timor, and security operations resulted in mass human rights violations.<sup>12</sup> Indonesian military action in Papua gave rise to an armed resistance group known as the Organization for Papuan Independence (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka* or OPM). Armed conflict continued to flare, fueled by the presence of transmigrants<sup>13</sup> from other parts of Indonesia, natural

<sup>8</sup> New York Agreement, 1962, Article XVIII d., <[www.vrijooosttimor.nl/PDFs/New\\_York\\_%20Agreement.pdf](http://www.vrijooosttimor.nl/PDFs/New_York_%20Agreement.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup> AJAR et al., 2015, “The Practice of Torture: Business as Usual in Papua,” 7, <<http://asia-ajar.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Torture-report-English.pdf>>.

<sup>10</sup> See more “United Nations Security Forces”, <[peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unsfbackgr.html](http://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unsfbackgr.html)>.

<sup>11</sup> T. Thamrin, Boven Digul: *Lambang Perlawanan terhadap Kolonialisme* (Surabaya: Ciscorn, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> See Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Violations (KPP HAM) in Papua/Irian Jaya, 8 May 2001 (for Abepura and for Wasior/Wamena cases); Report of the National Investigation Commission on the Killing of Theys Eluay, 2002; and Report on Torture at Tiginambut, Puncak Jaya, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> The transmigration programme was a government policy to convert forest areas into large-scale colonial project areas. By 1984, the government had relocated 3.6 million people from Java, Bali,

resource extraction through mining and logging, and the persistent use of violence by state security forces to quell dissent.

After the fall of Suharto, a group of Papuan leaders informed President B. J. Habibie of their continued desire for independence. Recognizing the need to address this sentiment, the Indonesian government made some concessions. Prohibitions on calling the province “Papua” and raising the Morning Star flag were lifted and, in 2001, a Special Autonomy Law was passed to protect indigenous Papuan interests and promote political autonomy. The law states that 80% of revenue from natural resources (with the exception of 70% for oil and gas) remains in the province, Papuan culture is preserved, and a Papuan People’s Council (Majelis Rakyat Papua or MRP) is established as a statutory body to protect the interests of indigenous Papuans. The Special Autonomy Law provides for equality between women and men, and quotas for women’s representation in the MRP.

However, many Papuans believe the promises for reform presented under Papua’s Special Autonomy Bill have not been honored. To date, a truth commission and a human rights court have not been established; there has been little acknowledgement of past human rights violations; and Papuans continue to feel their very existence, way of life, and traditional connections to the land are threatened.

In 2003, President Megawati Soekarnoputri signed a decree dividing the province into two. This was contrary to the spirit of the special autonomy law which stated that the “division of Papua province into provinces shall be carried out with the approval of the MRP and the DPRP [Papua Provincial Parliament] giving close attention to socio-cultural unity, readiness of human resources, and economic ability and development in the future” (Article 76).<sup>14</sup>

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Madura, and Lombok islands to Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Moluccas, and Papua islands. During the 1970s and 1980s, the transmigration programme focused on the development of subsistence agriculture. In the 1990s until the programme officially ended in 1999, the emphasis changed to supplying labour for Industrial Plantation Forests (HTI) and palm oil plantations. See KKKP report, “Reclaiming Indonesia”, 2014, 156.

<sup>14</sup> F. Zamzami, “Politik, Perang, dan Pemekaran Papua,” [Republika.co.id](http://Republika.co.id), 1 November 2019; <[republika.co.id/berita/kolom/fokus/19/11/01/q09xhf282-politik-perang-dan-pemekaran-papua](http://republika.co.id/berita/kolom/fokus/19/11/01/q09xhf282-politik-perang-dan-pemekaran-papua)>; “Dividing Papua: How Not to Do It,” International Crisis Group Briefing, 9 April 2003; <[crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/dividing-papua-how-not-to-do-it](http://crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/dividing-papua-how-not-to-do-it)>.

Special Autonomy has failed to stem the tide of violence. Over the years since *Reformasi*, security forces have contributed to unrest and violence in Papua.<sup>15</sup> With the promise of transitional justice essentially defunct, the culture of impunity for perpetrators of violence against Papuan civilians continues to flourish.

The Special Autonomy Law could have been an opportunity to address historical wrongs in Papua using a transitional justice approach. However, the two-decade period for special autonomy is nearing its end without much evidence of political will to implement provisions that could have contributed to ending the cycle of violence.

The Special Autonomy Law has specific articles that reflect the promises of *Reformasi* to seek truth and justice, and to forge a new relationship between Jakarta and Papua, and to ensure gender equality in the province.

Transitional Justice Provisions under Special Autonomy Law No. 21 of 2001	Current Implementation
<i>Right to Truth</i>	
Establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission tasked with “historical clarification and reconciliation” (Article 46)	Not established
<i>Right to Justice</i>	
Establishment of a representative office of the National Human Rights Commission	Established
Establishment of a Human Rights Court (Article 45:2)	Not established

<sup>15</sup> R. Chauvel, “Governance and the Cycle of Violence in Papua: The Nduga Crisis,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 7, issue 2, no. 4 (15 January 2019); <apjpf.org/2019/02/Chauvel.html>. Although Chauvel’s case study focuses on Nduga, his insights regarding violence in Papua have more general relevance.

### *Institutional Reform to Ensure Violations are not Repeated*

Special measures to ensure fulfilment of the rights of indigenous Papuans to employment and to be elected to strategic positions in government and state institutions, and recognition of traditional customs.	Established
Establishment of the Papuan People’s Council ( <i>Majelis Rakyat Papua</i> , MRP), a statutory body with the mandate to protect and recognize indigenous people’s rights, <b>empower women</b> , and promote religious tolerance. The MRP have a role to oversee appointments to the highest positions of the executive and legislative institutions in Papua; and must approve government agreements with any parties that have an impact on the protection of indigenous people’s rights; to act as a spokesperson for complaints on indigenous rights; and to provide input to provincial executive and legislative bodies on the protection of indigenous rights. The MRP is made up of representatives of indigenous and religious groups, with <b>30% representation of women</b> . (Article 19:1)	Established
Article 43 acknowledges and protects customary land rights and requires consultation with traditional landowners for any change in usage.	Partial
The law also provides for the establishment of local parties (Article 28), and the establishment of a flag and song as “a cultural symbol ... not to be positioned as a symbol of sovereignty” (Article 2).	Not established
In Article 47, the law promotes the <b>human rights of indigenous women</b> and articulates the obligation to make every effort to achieve gender equality.	Partial

After two decades, many of the above provisions have yet to be fully implemented. Despite central government funds for ‘accelerating development,’ political analysts have commented on the failure of such policies and deeply felt issues around human rights violations and injustice are not addressed.<sup>16</sup>

In line with Special Autonomy or Otsus legislation, the 20-year period for funding by the central government ends in December 2021, at which time the Indonesian government will conduct an evaluation of its effectiveness. Debates and political maneuvering are already well underway, both in Jakarta and among the Papuan elite. But for many Papuans, “Otsus 2.0” will be doomed to failure if it is designed only as a superficial counter-measure to independence, without meaningful efforts to address the underlying causes of the independence movement, including the loss of land and lack of political participation by Papuans themselves, especially women.

## Efforts to document systemic violence against women

From 2009 to 2010, the Women’s Working Group of the Papuan People’s Assembly (*Pokja Perempuan MRP*), working with the National Commission on the Elimination of Violence against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*), and key civil society actors, conducted a study on violence against Papuan women since 1963. The report, entitled *Enough is Enough!* documented some 260 cases of state and domestic violence. The report was handed to the chair of the MRP in a public ceremony held in Jayapura.<sup>17</sup> The report provided a compelling record of cases of human rights violations against women that took place both before and after *Reformasi*. At the same time, the report

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<sup>16</sup> See for example A. Ruhyanto, “Papua: How Indonesian president Jokowi is trying-and failing -to win hearts and minds,” 5 December 2018.

<[theconversation.com/papua-how-indonesian-president-jokowi-is-trying-and-failing-to-win-hearts-and-minds-107826](http://theconversation.com/papua-how-indonesian-president-jokowi-is-trying-and-failing-to-win-hearts-and-minds-107826)>; B. Singh, “Why is West Papua in Constant Turmoil: The Indonesian territory has struggled for independence for more than 50 years,” *The Diplomat*, 12 September 2019, <[thediplomat.com/2019/09/why-is-west-papua-in-constant-turmoil/](http://thediplomat.com/2019/09/why-is-west-papua-in-constant-turmoil/)>.

<sup>17</sup> “Enough is Enough: Testimonies of Papuan Women Victims of Violence and Human Rights Violations 1963-2009,” <[www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-IDN-Enough-Women\\_Papua-Report-2010.pdf](http://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-IDN-Enough-Women_Papua-Report-2010.pdf)>.





A sign which reads 'Customary Land Owned by Subur Clans: Not For Palm Oil.' Below it is a reference to the 2012 decision of the national Constitutional Court (35/PUU-X/2012), which recognized the rights and authority of customary communities over their ancestral territories. Photo by AJAR/PWG Team, Boven Digeol late 2019.

covered cases of domestic violence, showing the link between gender-based violence in public and private spheres. The report provided five key findings:

1. The state's security approach prioritizes violence to paralyze opponents, without serious sanctions for perpetrators of human rights violations, including perpetrators of violence against women.
2. The practice of discrimination against women in Papua perpetuates violence against women.
3. Natural resource conflict, political conflict, and power struggles from local to national levels, foster situations where both state and domestic violence against women increases.

4. There is no serious response or political will from the government to resolve the conflict in Papua in general, or the problem of violence against women in particular.
5. Overlapping layers of trauma and powerlessness are not addressed giving rise to a cycle of victimization.

In 2011, in response to this report, the MRP and Papuan parliament passed a local law establishing a provincial-level commission to provide assistance to women victims. This Special Local Regulation (*Perdasus*) on the Recovery of the Rights of Indigenous Papuan Women Victims of Violence and Human Rights Violations would provide a local mechanism to acknowledge Papuan women's experiences of violence and provide urgent assistance.<sup>18</sup> Although the regulation was passed into law in 2011, it has not been implemented for almost a decade.

### **I Am Here: voices of Papuan women in the face of unrelenting violence<sup>19</sup>**

Despite efforts to document violence against women, there has been little progress towards prevention and justice. In 2019, ten years after the joint MRP and Women's Commission Report, PWG published a report on violence against women, integrating participatory and trauma-sensitive methods. PWG looked at the spectrum of violence, from state violence, such as conflict over natural resources, loss of indigenous lands, and sexual and gender-based violence related to political conflict, to domestic violence. PWG documented 249 cases between 2013 and 2019. Women spoke of violence in the past and its long-term impact on their health and social economic welfare, as well as the impact of ongoing political and domestic violence. Of these 249 cases:

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<sup>18</sup> Pemerintah Daerah Papua, 2011, "Peraturan Daerah Khusus, Nomer 1." <dpr-papua.go.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PERDA-NOMOR-1-TAHUN-2011-TTG-PEMULIHAN-HAK-PEREMPUAN-PAPUA-SALINAN.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> PWG facilitated a process of action research from 2013-2019 that involved 249 indigenous Papuan women. A report in Indonesian was launched at the Papuan Governor's Office in 2016 and an updated English version was published in 2019. The report's key findings and recommendations on violence against women are reproduced here. The report in full can be accessed online: <asia-ajar.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/I-am-Here-Voices-of-Papuan-Women-2019.pdf>.



- 65 had experienced state violence. Despite these incidents constituting human rights violations, none of the women received redress from the state. Civil society initiatives to assist these victims have been inconsistent (p. 21).
- 37 had experienced domestic violence. The prevalence of domestic violence, as well as a lack of services and access to justice is a critical issue they face (p. 29).

### *A Framework for recovery and empowerment*

Hope for a Better Future	Resilience of Spirit to Overcome Trauma
Sustainable Foundation for Life	Recognition, Security, and Justice

A key lesson from the research emphasizes that the needs of indigenous women survivors of violence must be addressed in a holistic and balanced way that seeks to improve their lives. There are four distinct but inter-related elements that can contribute to the recovery of women victims. Only then can they, their families, and their communities, become agents of change for lives free from violence. These four elements are:

1. Following initial provisions to support victims after incidents of violence (such as legal protection and provision of health and other services), serious efforts are needed to strengthen **the foundations of the women's lives**. This includes adequate housing, access to health services, access to education, and access to sources of livelihood including land, gardens, forests, and water.
2. To achieve justice and security for women victims, the government and communities need to give **recognition** to the victims, especially victims of state violence. A clear and consistent message that violence against women is wrong must come from the state, as well as religious and customary institutions. This is in addition to ensuring access to justice providing victims with a sense of security.

3. Strengthening **healing processes that strengthen the spirit** to address trauma and cycles of victimization must be a priority for those working with survivors. Access to long-term psycho-social support and services should be prioritized, while at the same time acknowledging that healing processes are often spiritual. Therefore, efforts must include working with religious and customary institutions that touch the lives of victims. Long-term assistance is crucial to ensure victims heal.
4. Finally, women victims need a **glimmer of hope** to improve their lives and that of their children. Without a sense of optimism, women will abandon efforts to build solidarity with other victims, as well as efforts to build a life and community free from violence. (pp. 61-63)







A group of women walk to go hunting in their traditional forests.  
Photo by Albertus Vembrianto.





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## Walking a New Path with Participatory Tools



The idea for this research came out of a realization that for women in Papua, the loss of access and control over their land and natural resources is fundamental. Although there are many groups working on conservation and indigenous people's rights to natural resources, we believed that the voices of Papuan women were still unheard.

Initially, our research team conducted focused group discussions with key stakeholders in five communities, including male and female traditional leaders, local authorities, and others, to inform them of the purpose of the research, to gain insights into the social issues faced by communities, and to identify potential facilitators and participants for community-based research.

Based on these consultations, PWG adapted participatory action research tools outlined in an existing manual, "Stone and Flower: A guide to understanding and action for women survivors". We created seven activities to engage in a deep listening exercise to learn about the experiences of indigenous women impacted by land and natural resource conflict. The aim of these participatory tools was to gain a fuller picture of women's lives before conflict, their relationship and knowledge of the land, and how their lives have been impacted by conflict.

1. **My symbol:** we asked participants to introduce themselves by choosing a symbol that best represents their qualities and experiences.
2. **River of life:** participants shared their life stories by drawing pictures of a river and describing happy and difficult times using metaphors of calm and turbulent waters.
3. **Community mapping:** participants drew a giant map of their community, identifying their homes, and locations important to their lives and livelihoods (gardens, forests, sources of medicinal plants, water, sacred places, and so on). They used the original names of these places.
4. **Timeline, a history of our land and changes:** participants were asked to share their collective memories of what had taken place on their land. What were the changes, when did they happen, and what were the impacts on women? Have there been changes in climate, levels and purity of water? Have there been changes in how and what families eat?

5. **Body mapping:** participants drew contours of their bodies and were asked to mark sites of happiness and strength, as well as sites of sadness and suffering. They were asked to discuss how land conflict impacted on their bodies and health; and how their changes in diet impacted their bodies.
6. **My resources:** participants described their sources of livelihood, before, during, and after land conflict. This process deepened our knowledge of the cycle of poverty experienced by women impacted by land conflict.
7. **Stone and flower:** we adapted a tool to better understand how women felt about their relationship with land. Participants chose a stone (negative) or a flower (positive) to describe whether they felt that they are able to guard and nurture their land for the future; whether they feel that they have some justice; and whether they are able to live a life free from violence. Reasons for choosing a stone or a flower were discussed.

This action research was conducted between December 2019 and February 2020. In total, 100 Papuan women from five communities were involved. The oldest participant was 65 and is employed in one of the palm oil plantations. The youngest was 15 and was still in fifth grade primary school. Areas where there has been natural resource conflict were selected, including regions where palm oil plantations have been in existence for more than 20 years, as well as those areas with plans to take-over land for development projects.

Based on these consultations, we refined our approach. For a more complete description of our methodology refer to “**Mother Hearth: A guide to participatory learning on land and natural resources with indigenous women in Papua.**” This manual includes the seven research tools described above, supplemented with a range of new tools inspired from our experience doing research. We created a pocketbook to inform indigenous women of the opportunities for advocacy to protect their land and forests.

This book is about indigenous women’s experience of losing their land and forest which form the foundation of their lives. We learn how some have adapted and taken up new opportunities, working for wages at palm oil plantations, but still leaning on their connection to the natural resources

around them. Others lost a safety net that has supported their families for generations yet remained unable to enter a cash-based economy based on short-term goals. They spoke about the need to protect their land, and how they are left in the margins.

Each woman who participated in this research had a compelling story. Woven together, these stories provide a **stark picture of the failure to pave a way for indigenous communities to develop under their own agency, with all members participating in decisions about their future.** We see how women continue to be sidelined, and how they continue to use their strength and tenacity to fight for survival.

Because the topic is broad and often seen as “not women’s business”, we designed our research using inter-generational, participatory tools that were both enjoyable and meaningful, facilitating learning and action with the women. We tried, with some success, to bring about change in the lives of the women who agreed to share their time and their stories.







Two women walk through a deforested area of Papua.  
Photo by Albertus Vembrianto.





# Carrying a Heavy Burden: National Development and Global Commodities





*So, the company made promises to us, especially to those who were landowners. They promised we would get housing, clean water, and a monthly guaranteed income ... We thought it was true, so we said okay ... they had already given us 15 kilos [of rice]. There was sugar, coffee, tea, but then it began to decrease ... up to now there's just been one promise after another that hasn't been fulfilled. The clean water they promised, hasn't come either. – BC, Boven Digoel Regency*

*There were promises ... for example, for each of the indigenous land owners, those with land rights, [the company promised] it would build them nice houses, send their children to school, give attention to the elderly ... But to this day it's never done a thing. – UA, Jayapura Regency*

To contextualize the stories of the women at the heart of our fieldwork, we must briefly examine national policies and international market demands that have affected women's access to land and natural resources, and have for decades driven violent conflict. Although our focus is on current impacts and challenges, we know that we must understand how these policies have been shaped over time.

Since the first days of Suharto's New Order, investment in Papua has focused largely on the exploitation of natural resources for the global market, and the military has been deployed to safeguard the process. The Indonesian state's assertion of its exclusive authority over land and natural resources, and the pattern of unsustainable extraction of those resources, including the conversion of precious forests to commercial plantations, is not unique to Papua.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, indigenous people throughout the country seek to re-

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Ministry of Forestry's own figures, 262 corporations have plantation concessions extending over 9.39 million hectares of the forest estate, managed under licences that may last for up to 100 years. In addition, 303 corporations have timber exploitation rights over 21.49 million hectares of the forest estate, while 600 oil palm plantation corporations control at least 9.4 million hectares of land under commercial lease rights (Toha and Collier 2015). Critics contend that, together, all oil and gas, oil palm, timber and logging concessions cover 68 per cent of the country (Fogarty 2014). Such figures often include the land banks that private and state companies have accumulated under various licences and set aside for later development (McCarthy, Vel and Affiff 2013). Source: J. McCarthy and K. Robinson, "Land, economic development, social justice and environmental management in Indonesia: the search for the people's sovereignty" in *Land and Development in Indonesia: Searching for the People's Sovereignty*, (2016): 1-34.

assert their land rights, fight for justice, and heal the devastating environmental, economic, and social impacts on their local communities.

However, in Papua, the Indonesian approach of militarization and resource extraction has been implemented with an overlay of racism and violence that surpasses even what has been imposed on indigenous people elsewhere in the country. This pattern of resource violence, which began with Suharto and continues under the current “Special Autonomy”, has proved harmful, not only to Papua’s natural environment, but also to the basic dignity of the Papuan people. Meanwhile, the steady influx of non-Papuan has left local people feeling overwhelmed, overlooked, and disrespected, as the newcomers seize job opportunities in the expanding resource industry and the civil service. These are some of the root causes of continued political conflict in Papua.

As our case studies illustrate, these impacts have placed a particularly heavy burden on Papuan women, who have been pushed aside and victimized by government, corporations, transmigrants, and even by their own communities, and who now demand their voices are heard and their rights acknowledged.

## **New Order: state authority, resource extraction and national development**

Suharto’s “New Order” was characterized by a complete turnaround of socialist policies, including the nationalization of the economy and the reversal of Sukarno’s isolationism. Suharto embraced capitalism as the engine of national economic development, and his regime embraced the widespread involvement of the military in every sphere of civilian life to enforce (often violently) this vision and to suppress dissent, especially dissent deemed a threat to national interests.

By 1966, Indonesia’s Provisional Consultative Assembly declared that the country’s natural wealth should be exploited to strengthen the national economy and, as capital was limited, legislation was urgently needed to

attract foreign capital.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, the New Order passed foundational legislation, included a law allowing direct foreign investment, and the Basic Laws on Forestry and Mining. The central organizing principle of these laws was the assertion of the supreme authority of the unitary state over all “unowned” land and all the natural resources contained therein (both above and below ground), to be used for the “national good”. This founding principle of state authority, and its narrow vision of the value of natural resources solely as a commodity, became both the legal and philosophical vision for decades to come.<sup>3</sup>

#### Freeport’s historical deal<sup>4</sup>

Within months of the passage of the Law on Direct Foreign Investment, the US-based company Freeport became the first foreign company to win a concession with the new government. Freeport signed a 30-year contract to mine Mt. Ertsberg in the Mimika Regency of Papua, one of the world’s largest copper deposits, and a site of great spiritual significance to the Papuan people. Later, in the 1990s, due to close personal and economic ties to Suharto and his family, Freeport won a contract to mine nearby Grasberg, the world’s largest gold deposit. The mountain top removal and construction of an open pit mine in this sacred mountain amounted to the decapitation of the spiritual “earth mother”, and became a symbol of the violation of Papuan people, and women in particular, by the state and foreign corporations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This discussion of the Provisional Assembly’s Decision No. XXIII/1966 to Renew the Foundation for Economics, Finances, and Development is found in Y. Zakaria, “20 Tahun UU Kehutanan, Bagaimana Kehidupan Masyarakat Adat?,” *Mongabay*, 11 September 2019, <mongabay.co.id/2019/09/11/20-tahun-uu-kehutanan-bagaimana-kehidupan-masyarakat-adat-1/>.

<sup>3</sup> For discussion of the impact of this view of Indonesian State authority over forests, see N. Peluso and P. Vandergeest. “Genealogies of the political forest and customary rights in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand”. *Journal of Asian Studies* 60 (3), 761-812.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed historical study of Freeport in Indonesia, with insights related to development of a political economy negotiated between Jakarta and Washington DC, see D. Leith, “Freeport and the Suharto Regime, 1965-1998,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 14, no. 1 (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press: Spring 2002): 69-100; <scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/13611/v14n1-69-100.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> A. Feith, 2000. “Strategies of Rule, Strategies of Resistance: Women and The West Papuan Resistance Struggle.” Honors Dissertation, Queensland University. Chapter 4, <papuaweb.org/dlib/s123/feith/ba.pdf>.

In addition to rich mineral deposits, the Ertsberg mine came to be the lowest extraction-price copper mine in the world (although the price of extraction in bribes and unofficial payments is not included in calculations). Freeport's Papua operations became the most valuable in its portfolio. At the same time, Freeport became a crucial source of income tax to the Indonesian government, and the source of illicit payments to Suharto, other government officials, and the military, who acted as the company's private security force. As such, Freeport developed a mutually dependent relationship with the government and armed forces. The mine site and its devastating environmental and social impacts became a flashpoint for political resistance in Papua, to which the government responded by further militarizing the region and exacerbating the cycle of violence.<sup>6</sup>

Freeport's relations with the New Order became the prime example of Suharto-style militarized "crony capitalism".<sup>7</sup> Foreign corporations paid for access to lucrative raw materials at a low cost due to their failure to pay compensation to local people or undertake costly environmental protections. In this way, the resource sector and resource rich provinces became pivotal to national economic and political security.

Following the Freeport deal, a flood of foreign companies rushed in, anxious to win natural resource contracts for the extraction of raw materials such as minerals, oil and gas, and timber.<sup>8</sup> Among them was Exxon Mobil, who signed a contract for access to the world's largest Liquid Natural Gas reserves in Aceh, a concession that, like Freeport, would become a central point of contention in the decades of bloody political conflict in that province.

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<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2006. "Too High A Price: The Human Rights Cost of the Indonesian Military's Economic Activities," <[www.hrw.org/reports/2006/indonesia0606/](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/indonesia0606/)>.

<sup>7</sup> M. Vakitiotis, 1998, *Indonesian Politics Under Suharto: The Rise and Fall of the New Order*. Routledge.

<sup>8</sup> B. Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960–1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 612–13.



Other New Order laws and regulations further strengthened this centralized approach to natural resource extraction for maximum profit, rather than espousing sustainable management or conservation, or reinvestment in local communities where the burden of resource extraction was felt most acutely. For example, forestry policies were aimed at producing timber, mainly for the international market. The environmental value of intact forests in protecting the quality of water, soil, air, or the maintenance of biodiversity, were barely acknowledged, much less prioritized by the New Order's Ministry of Forestry, and the value of forestlands to the wellbeing of local communities was virtually invisible.

Vast areas of rich primary forests – over 90% of the total land area outside of Java, Madura, and Bali – were designated State Forest, much of it under customary claim. Timber concessions, or 25-year commercial forest use contracts, were granted to corporations in order to selectively log valuable species. Once these species were logged, the forest was deemed by the Ministry as “no longer productive”, regardless of the number of actual trees remaining. Permits to clear-cut “unproductive” forests could therefore be issued in order to convert forests to pulp and paper or agricultural plantations, primarily oil palm, copra, sugar, and spices, depending on demand of the international market.

## **Plantation expansion, global food crisis and the “green” economy**

Vast plantations of agricultural commodities have been a feature of resource control since the days of the Dutch East Indies Company. Plantation expansion has continued since that time, although markets and commodities of choice have changed.

During the 1960s and 70s, the emphasis of New Order forest management was on extracting raw timber, and only later on the processing luxury veneers and plywood. But by the early 1980s, attention began to turn to the conversion of “unproductive” forestlands into industrial plantations, of which oil palm was the central player.

Increasing demand for palm oil, used primarily for food (especially as a staple in the diet of India's burgeoning population), but increasingly as a biofuel<sup>9</sup>, made it an extremely lucrative investment.<sup>10</sup> Palm oil has a high yield per hectare, is the least expensive oil to produce, and is among the most energy intensive vegetable oils for biofuel.<sup>11</sup> Many countries, including Indonesia, have introduced legally mandated biofuel quotas, which has fuelled demand for palm oil. Demand for "green" biofuel has driven an expansion of plantations, often by clearing natural forests.

Indonesia has responded to increasing demand for palm oil by offering heavy financial incentives to growers, in order to corner the global market. By 2006, Indonesia outpaced Malaysia as the world's leading producer. By January 2020, the amount of land used for palm oil plantations in Indonesia reached 16.38 million hectares, while the total amount produced is set to total 43.5 million tonnes by 2021.<sup>12</sup> The areas with the highest density of palm oil are located in Sumatra and Kalimantan, because of the less severe topography and the better developed infrastructure. But as the area for plantations dwindles in western Indonesia over the last decade, it has expanded to Papua.<sup>13</sup>

Plantations of food crops have also seen a dramatic expansion in Papua as part of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate or MIFEE. Launched in 2010, the MIFEE was promoted as a solution to the "global crisis" of surging demand for food and fuel, by expanding plantations of oil palm,

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<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, 15 July 2013, "The Dark Side of the Green Economy," <[www.hrw.org/report/2013/07/15/dark-side-green-growth/human-rights-impacts-weak-governance-indonesias-forestry](http://www.hrw.org/report/2013/07/15/dark-side-green-growth/human-rights-impacts-weak-governance-indonesias-forestry)>.

<sup>10</sup> D. Bentivoglio, G. Bucci, and A. Finco, "Factor affecting the palm oil boom in Indonesia: a time series analysis," presentation at the International Association of Agricultural Economists Conference, Vancouver, British Columbia, 28 July - 2 August 2018, <[ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/277129/](http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/277129/)>, 3, 5, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 7–9, 16.

<sup>12</sup> The US Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service, *Oilseeds and Products Annual*, (Washington DC: 19 March 2020).

<sup>13</sup> S.J. Santosa, "Palm Oil Boom in Indoensia: From Plantation to Downstream Products and Biodiesel," 463, <[onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/cfen.200800039](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/cfen.200800039)>.

wood pulp, corn, soya, and sugarcane.<sup>14</sup> The location of the MIFEE close to the international border with Papua New Guinea, in addition to the involvement of businessmen with high-level military connections<sup>15</sup>, means the area is heavily militarized. Reports of community experience with the MIFEE have shown the involvement of the military in intimidating communities and co-opting local leadership in the land acquisition process.<sup>16</sup>

As with oil palm, vast swathes of commercial agricultural plantations have been established to produce commodities to meet the needs, not of local populations, but of the global market. Meanwhile, it is the local communities who bear the burden of the loss of their land and forests, essential to their lives and identities.

## Plantation expansion and the influx of migrants

The promotion of large plantations fit neatly with Indonesia's transmigration policy. This policy seeks to relieve the land crisis in the densely populated islands of Java, Bali, and Sumatera, by moving people to more sparsely populated areas in eastern Indonesia. This policy accomplished what Suharto's government came to view as its mission to modernize traditional rural communities who adhered to customary lifestyles, livelihoods, and spiritual beliefs the government believed to be "backward" and in need of "development".

The development of a hybrid industrial and smallholder plantation scheme called Nucleus Estates (*Perkebunan Inti Rakyat* or PIR) was an important shift in plantation management and the rise of transmigrant labor, an issue of particular concern in Papua. Under this scheme, a company dedicated a percentage of its concession to smallholder plots, with all inputs

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<sup>14</sup> For an in-depth analysis of MIFEE and its implications, see Y. Zakaria, E.O. Kleden, and F. Samperante, "Beyond Malind imagination: Beberapa catatan atas upaya percepatan pembangunan" cq. *Merauke Integrated Food and Estate (MIFEE) di Kabupaten Merauke, Papua, dan kesiapan masyarakat adat setempat dalam menghadapinya* (Jakarta: PUSAKA, 2010), <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03066150.2013.873029?src=recsys&journalCode=fjps20](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03066150.2013.873029?src=recsys&journalCode=fjps20)>.

<sup>15</sup> Franciscan International and the Asian Human Rights Commission. 2011. "Human Rights in Papua," <[www.humanrights.asia/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Human-Rights-in-Papua-2010-2011-English.pdf](http://www.humanrights.asia/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Human-Rights-in-Papua-2010-2011-English.pdf)>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

sold by the company to the smallholders on credit and a commitment to sell the harvest to the company at a set price. These plantations could be developed involving local people, but in the 1980s the PIR-Trans were used to accomplish the goals of the transmigration program and secure cheap labor and low production costs for the company. The number of transmigrants moved to Papua increased throughout the 1980s and 90s, opening up hundreds of thousands of hectares of forest for cultivation, and providing inexpensive “captive” labor (with no outside social support and few other employment options) that helped support a boom in palm oil plantations.<sup>17</sup>

Numbers of transmigrants continue to rise under Special Autonomy, in part to supply labor demands for mega-plantation projects Like MIFEE.<sup>18</sup> Migrants and their impact on the marginalization of Papuans are a central to the ongoing conflict.

Critics point out that transmigration failed many of its ambitious goals. Impoverished migrants remained marginalized as disempowered agricultural day laborers in their new home.<sup>19</sup> While, many Papuans see transmigrants to Papua, not only as competitors for jobs, but also as an intentional effort by to culturally “Indonesianize” them. As such immigration remains a hot button issue fanning the conflict.<sup>20</sup>

The impact of transmigration on Papuan women is particularly heavy. Not only is the strain on natural resources and access to land an issue, but

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<sup>17</sup> L. Soetrisno, *Transmigrasi di Indonesia 1905–1985* as quoted in I. Ardanareswari, “Sejarah Transmigrasi Orang Jawa ke Papua,” *Tirtoid*, 22 August 2019; <tirto.id/sejarah-transmigrasi-orang-jawa-ke-papua-egJs>.

<sup>18</sup> J. Elmslie, “The Great Divide: West Papuan Demographics Revisited; Settlers Dominate Coastal Regions but the Highlands Still Overwhelmingly Papuan,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 15, no. 1, issue 2(15 January 2017), 8, <apjif.org/-Jim-Elmslie/5005/article.pdf>. Elmslie writes that in 2010, Papuans comprised less than 40% of the total population in Merauke Regency. “... Papuans are even deprived of employment as labourers on the [MIFEE] plantations as workers are being brought in from Java ....”

<sup>19</sup> M. Adhiati and A. Bobsien (Eds.), “Indonesia’s Transmigration Programme – An Update: A report prepared for Down to Earth,” July 2001; <downtoearth-indonesia.org/old-site/ctrans.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> R. Dagur, “Indonesia’s transmigration program threatens Papuans,” *UCAnews*, 6 November 2016, <ucanews.com/news/state-run-transmigration-program-threatens-papuans-critics-say/72327#>; “Writer links recent transmigrants to Papua conflict,” 23 April 2018; <rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/355763/writer-links-recent-transmigrants-to-papua-conflict>.

non-Papuans often tend to dominate the economy in many sectors, including food markets. This is evident by often repeated stories of Papuan women must compete with transmigrants for space and customers in open air markets.

## The reform era: “Local” development for whom?

The fall of Suharto bought a wave of political reforms known as *Reformasi*. Changes were intended to reduce corruption, strengthen human rights, decentralize bureaucratic authority and distribute the benefits of resource management more equitably.

Despite significant changes in the political sphere, the dominant development paradigm remained intact. The first cabinet after Suharto was dubbed the “Development Reform Cabinet” (May 1998 to October 1999), however there was no fundamental change to the government’s commitment to macro-economic growth with strong reliance on foreign investments and the exploitation of natural resources.

The most significant change under *Reformasi* was “local autonomy” or decentralization – a shift in authority from central government to the district or *Kabupaten*.<sup>21</sup> Under decentralization, the district head, known as the *Bupati*, was empowered to negotiate directly with investors and issue permits or concessions for the exploitation of natural resources.

However, the laws and regulations that provided the framework for this relocation of authority were passed very quickly in the immediate aftermath of Suharto’s fall, out of political expedience and with little forethought to how they would be implemented. As a result, many laws and regulations were later amended or withdrawn, and some power was clawed back by the center. Meanwhile, in many districts these revisions were weakly enforced.

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<sup>21</sup> Although principles of regional autonomy are mentioned in the 1945 Constitution, Articles 18, 18A, and 18B, the long New Order era effectively prevented any development of regional autonomy. The concept got new impetus through decisions of the People’s Consultative Assembly (No. XV/MPR/1998, No. IV/MPR/2000) regarding implementation of regional autonomy Law 32/2004 on Regional Government, Law 33/2004 on Financial Balance between Central and Regional Governments, and Law 23/2014 that was a revision of Law 32/2004 in terms of the structure and also the authority of regional governments.

The result is a deeply contradictory legal framework with little political will to clarify it. Prior to *Reformasi*, there was intense competition between the Ministries of Forestry, Agriculture, Mining, and the Environment for control of natural resources and the taxes and fees that flow from them. Under decentralization, this competition has persisted and even worsened, as ministries must now compete with local *Bupatis*, and in the case of Special Autonomy, with governors. The investment landscape has become even more complicated with new layers of bureaucracy in play.

Decentralization was designed to benefit “local people” by moving decision-making and control of revenues from Jakarta to the district. In some ways, because of closer proximity, officials and administrations are more efficient and accountable to local communities. However, decentralization has largely failed in its ambitions. One reason is that local governments have to raise their own revenues to support their now inflated operating costs, including new salaries for the large numbers of officials and civil servants (teachers, medical staff, and so on) moved from Jakarta to district capitals. Increase in employment could have been a means boost local economies, but there has generally been little effort to develop the capacity of local populations, migrants have largely filled these positions. This has been especially true in Papua.

Increased fiscal demands on operating budgets has meant that the issuing of natural resource concessions is most the easiest source of tax revenues (and bribes for local election campaigns). At the same time, the capacity and willingness of local governments to enforce environmental management regulations has not kept up with increased extraction.

## Special Autonomy’s broken promises

While decentralization has proven successful in some places in improving effectiveness and responsiveness of local governments, this has not been the case in Papua. New leadership in Jakarta following the fall of the New Order saw Special Autonomy as a means of quelling separatist movements, resolving conflicts, and accelerating development, while retaining Jakarta’s political authority. Indeed, the substance of Special Autonomy proposes principles

to address conflict resolution by providing greater provincial authority for managing government and natural resources; basic rights and empowerment for Papuans, including women; and broader participation in development with assurances of transparency and accountability.<sup>22</sup> With respect to resource management, the law includes provisions for local, autonomous governance (Articles 5-32); for the distribution of revenues from Papua's natural resources, for example, 80% of revenues from forestry, fishing, and mining operations, and 70% of revenues from oil and natural gas are to be given to Papua (Articles 33-42); the sustainable development and the environment (Articles 63-64); and the development of isolated, marginalized, and neglected Papuans (Article 66).<sup>23</sup>

However, Special Autonomy laws and regulations, like decentralization laws for the rest of Indonesia, were passed quickly out of political expedience, with no local consultation or forethought to how they would be implemented. As a result, they have failed spectacularly in their ambitions. The rush to extract resources under new jurisdictional authority has devastated local environments and forest-dependent communities. The central government's adherence to economic development as the solution to the ongoing conflict,<sup>24</sup> has failed to deliver decent education, healthcare, and living standards to the majority of indigenous Papuans.<sup>25</sup>

Most provisions of Special Autonomy were never implemented because of Jakarta's fears of increasing Papuan political strength. In particular, the failure to allow Papua to establish its own political parties has meant that Papua has been unable to negotiate effectively to force Jakarta to deliver specific reforms. With respect to natural resources, for example, under the

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<sup>22</sup> P. King, *West Papua and Indonesia since Suharto*, 83 as quoted in M. Halmin, *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> UU 21/2001 on Special Autonomy for Papua Province; English: <[refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=46af542e2](http://refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=46af542e2)>, Indonesian: <[walhi.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/uu-otonomi-khusus-papua.pdf](http://walhi.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/uu-otonomi-khusus-papua.pdf)>.

<sup>24</sup> "West Papua Now", [westpapuatabloid.com](http://westpapuatabloid.com), 10 April 2018; <[westpapuanow.com/2018/04/10/reducing-inequality-in-west-papua-by-accelerating-infrastructure-development/](http://westpapuanow.com/2018/04/10/reducing-inequality-in-west-papua-by-accelerating-infrastructure-development/)>; L. Nebe, translated by M. Chang, *Tempo.com*, 5 December 2019; <[en.tempo.co/read/1280548/the-flag-not-the-issue-papua-needs-development](http://en.tempo.co/read/1280548/the-flag-not-the-issue-papua-needs-development)>.

<sup>25</sup> ICTJ and ELSHAM Papua, 2012, "The Past That Has Not Passed: Human Rights Violations in Papua Before and After Reformasi," <[www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-ELSHAM-Indonesia-Papua-2012-English.pdf](http://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-ELSHAM-Indonesia-Papua-2012-English.pdf)>.



Papuan People's Council (*Majelis Rakyat Papua*, MRP) must give their consent to natural resource permits issued by the province. However, this has not been implemented.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, when the Papuan government attempted to pass local legislation to address the root causes of their suffering, the central government blocked it. The Ministry of Internal Affairs never ratified these bills, so they could not be implemented.<sup>27</sup> Papuans see this failure, not as bureaucratic inefficiency, but as a deliberate attempt to undermine local authority.

What has been delivered under Special Autonomy is a massive influx in revenue derived from natural resource extraction – since 2002, some \$7.2 billion (Rp 105 trillion) has been allocated by central government to the provinces of Papua and West Papua.<sup>28</sup> However, this large amount of money, with few controls on how it is spent, has created more problems than it has solved. Special Autonomy moved the seat of authority to the Governor's office. But the same legislation required funds allocated from central government be delivered primarily to the districts (80% in Papua and 90% in West Papua), rather than the provincial government, which would have greater capacity to spend it effectively.<sup>29</sup> Districts were unprepared to absorb this new money and allocate it effectively for education, health, and infrastructure initiatives. There was virtually no institutional support in budget management or procurement processes, and no transparency or effective anti-corruption measures put in place. As a result, a large proportion of these funds have been poorly spent or lost to corruption. The basic services promised to lift Papuans from grinding poverty remain elusive. But as analysts at IPAC have noted, Jakarta has not acted to correct this situation because the massive influx of unregulated funds also serves as “a useful tool to co-opt members

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<sup>26</sup> International Centre for Transitional Justice, *The Past Which has not Changed: Human Rights Violation in Papua Before and After Reformasi*, (New York: ICTJ, June 2012), 16.

<sup>27</sup> IPAC, *Renewing, Revising or Rejecting Special Autonomy In Papua*, IPAC Report no. 64. (Jakarta, 30 July 2020), 8.

<sup>28</sup> A. Sumule, 29 May 2020, “Evaluasi Otsus Papua: Tinjauan Bab Per Bab,” [suarapapua.com](http://suarapapua.com), <[suarapapua.com/2020/05/30/evaluasi-otsus-papua-tinjauan-bab-per-bab-bagian-ii/](http://suarapapua.com/2020/05/30/evaluasi-otsus-papua-tinjauan-bab-per-bab-bagian-ii/)>.

<sup>29</sup> Pemerintah Provinsi Papua, 2013, “Peraturan Daerah Khusus Provinsi Papua, Nomer 25.” <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/89763/perdasus-papua-no-25-tahun-2013> This regulation was required by Article 34 of the 2001 law.

of the Papua political elite or threaten them with prosecution if they do not deliver political support.”<sup>30</sup>

As in the rest of Indonesia, there has been a proliferation of new administrative districts in Papua established under decentralization and Special Autonomy. This process, known as *pemekaran* or “flowering” of administrative bureaucracies, has been particularly contentious in Papua as clans compete for spoils associated with new jurisdictions. Papua was divided into two provinces, and 32 new districts (*kabupaten*), with hundreds of new sub-districts (*kecamatan*) have been established. With each newly established district comes new offices, positions, and institutions, all with budgets and authority over development funds and the allocation of natural resource concessions. New offices bring opportunities to control revenues – both official and corrupt – and significant power and patronage.<sup>31</sup> The competition for control of natural resources and resource revenues that existed prior to *Reformasi* among the centralized ministries of Forestry, Agriculture, Mining, and the Environment, has only worsened under decentralization and Special Autonomy, as ministries now compete with local governments for authority. Increased competition has hastened the pace of extraction and its impact on local people, as our cases demonstrate.

Special Autonomy has further increased the tide of in-migration. Increase in employment opportunities with the “flowering” of administrative posts could have been used to stimulate local livelihoods and improve income levels. But

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<sup>30</sup> IPAC, 30 July 2020, 7.

<sup>31</sup> In 2013, IPAC analysts noted that Papua, which prior to Otsus had been a single province with 10 regencies, had become 2 provinces with 42 regencies, with 33 more awaiting parliamentary approval. The divisions have spurred increasing fractures along clan lines as elites compete for resources. “Ambitious local officials have an interest in creating more villages (*kampung*) to gain access to block grants for a village development program and more distrik (called *kecamatan* elsewhere in Indonesia) to reach the requisite number for a new *kabupaten* (regencies), where political and fiscal power is concentrated. More *kabupaten* raise the possibility of more provinces, and today at least three are under serious consideration .... There are different interests driving the push for new divisions of Papua, particularly at the *kabupaten* level. Bringing government closer to the people is a smokescreen. *Pemekaran* appears to be largely about gaining access to resources—especially central government revenue streams—but also about the promotion of clans (*suku*) and sub-clans”. Source: IPAC, *Carving Up Papua: More Districts, More Trouble*, (Jakarta, 9 October 2013).

there has been little effort to develop the capacity of local populations to fill new positions. Instead, they are outcompeted by migrant populations. Economic development, through natural resource exploitation, has attracted more and more non-Papuans, while devastating the natural forests on which Papuans depend, further inflaming local resentment and increasing poverty levels.<sup>32</sup>

The emphasis on development begs the question: development for whom? Economic development as it has been implemented draws more and more non-Papuans and outside investment to Papua, contributing to Papuan resentment. This, in turn, has led to increased security presence, among other reasons, to protect non-Papuans and the very economic projects that are supposedly intended to benefit Papuans. Yet, no amount of economic development can subsume the dynamics of racism that feed Papuan animosity.<sup>33</sup>

Since the passage of Special Autonomy, violence has continued in Papua. Security forces continue to detain and torture those speaking out and continue to fire on civilians and commit sexual violence against Papuan women.<sup>34</sup> Their presence has increased and is increasingly deployed to secure the nation's "vital assets". Whereas the ratio of police officers or soldiers to citizens averages 1:296 in other parts of Indonesia, in Papua the ratio is three times higher at 1:97.<sup>35</sup>

## Glimmers of hope?

Through this dark history there are still glimmers of hope. Small steps forward are often followed by a backlash and the recentralization of government authority. However, there remain seeds of strength and tools for resistance

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<sup>32</sup> IPAC, 27 February 2014, "Papua Update: The Latest on Otsus Plus," <[www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07802.1?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07802.1?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)>.

<sup>33</sup> A. Ruhyanto, "The Perils of the Prosperity Approach in Papua," *The Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 28 (22 November 2016): 490-98.

<sup>34</sup> For more detailed information regarding gender-based violence by the state in Papua since *Reformasi*, see sub-section 1.2. State Violence: 1999–2009 in *Enough is Enough! Testimonies of Papuan Women Victims of Violence and Human Rights Violations 1963–2009* (Jakarta: Komnas Perempuan and ICTJ Indonesia), 26-36.

<sup>35</sup> A. Supriatma, "TNI/Polri in West Papua: How Security Reforms Work in the Conflict Region," *Indonesia* no. 95 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, April 2013): 96-8.

that Papuan women can use in the ongoing struggle for their rights, dignity, and prosperity.

One such seed for hope has been the 2012 decision of the national Constitutional Court (35/PUU-X/2012), also known as ‘MK 35’, recognizing the rights and authority of customary (*adat*) communities over their ancestral territories. This decision clearly states that “customary forest is not state forest”, reaffirming that customary rights indeed constitute “ownership”. This recognition of customary ownership means that these areas cannot be subsumed under the sole authority of the State.

There have been a flurry of local regulations by Papuan provincial parliaments for the protection of *adat* land and ecosystems stemming from this decision.<sup>36</sup> For example, a provincial bill (No. 22/2008) was passed requiring the recognition of indigenous community rights and the participatory mapping of traditional territories, requiring industries profiting from *adat* land to share 30% of profits with the local communities.<sup>37</sup> However, in order for local laws to be implemented, the Special Autonomy requires the assent of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Unfortunately, this has not been forthcoming, so the regulations have not been implemented.

The Constitutional Court issued a decision (45/PUU-X/2011) that forest areas may not be unilaterally designated as State Forest by the ministry without the involvement of the district heads. Theoretically, district heads should establish a team, including community leaders, to investigate and resolve claims over forest lands to determine its status as private or state owned.<sup>38</sup> In reality, district heads have often been quicker than ministries to issue permits over forest lands, including customary lands, under their jurisdiction in order to reap the financial benefits (both legal and illegal) of resource extraction. But at least there is a process that legally should be

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<sup>36</sup> For example, the Regencies of Sorong, Teluk Bentuni, and Tamberauw have passed such regulations recognizing and protecting indigenous communities (see [www.aman.or.id](http://www.aman.or.id) for copies of these regulations).

<sup>37</sup> Pemerintah Provinsi Papua, 2008, “Peraturan Daerah Khusus Provinsi Papua, Nomer 22.” <[peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/125350/perdatus-papua-no-22-tahun-2008](http://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/125350/perdatus-papua-no-22-tahun-2008)>.

<sup>38</sup> R. Myers, et.al., “Claiming the forest: Inclusions and exclusions under Indonesia’s ‘new’ forest policies on customary forests.” *Land Use Policy* 22 (2017): 205-13.



followed in order to develop these lands. Now that the process is taking place in closer proximity to local communities, there may be some hope for communities and their advocates to make their voices heard.

These Constitutional Court decisions created a wave of excitement amongst activists as they threatened to upend the “business as usual” approach by which ministries unilaterally designate vast areas of community land as State Forest and lease them to corporations. However, as the Court is not legislative body, these decisions do not constitute law, but require a bill to be passed by National Parliament. To date this has not happened.

Following years of an Indigenous Peoples’ Bill languishing in a parliamentary committee, a wide-ranging “omnibus” bill, designed to generate economic growth by accelerating the process of land acquisition, was quickly passed during the Covid-19 lockdown. The government argued these steps were needed to boost investment to prop up slow economic growth during the pandemic. The law removes “obstacles to investment” by relaxing labor laws, environmental protections, and the rights of communities to take legal action against companies. In the name of “streamlining the permitting process”, the new law recentralizes the authority to issue business permits, removing the authority of local governments.<sup>39</sup> This unpopular law, sparked waves of protests from environmentalists, indigenous peoples’, labor activists, and religious organizations. Many groups have vowed to attempt to overturn the law as unconstitutional, and the broad popular outcry could have an impact on the legitimacy of the government.

Although it has not yet been implemented, the promise of MK 35 has energized the efforts of indigenous peoples, and their advocates to protest the neglect of their rights. The language of “customary forest is not state forest” has been used to impose customary restrictions on land or resource access (*sasi adat*) in protest at the seizure and clearing of customary forests for plantations.

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<sup>39</sup> Jakarta Post, 19 February 2020, “Guide to omnibus bill on job creation: 1028 pages in 10 minutes,” <[www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/02/21/guide-to-omnibus-bill-on-job-creation-1028-pages-in-8-minutes.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/02/21/guide-to-omnibus-bill-on-job-creation-1028-pages-in-8-minutes.html)>; H. Jong, 4 November 2020, *Mongabay*. “Omnibus Bill a ‘Major Problem’ for Environmental Protection,” <[news.mongabay.com/2020/11/indonesia-omnibus-law-global-investor-letter/](http://news.mongabay.com/2020/11/indonesia-omnibus-law-global-investor-letter/)>.

Other seeds of hope lie in the possibility of increasing pressure on countries that consume commodities produced on Papuan land. Activists demand that attention be paid to the role of consumer markets that result in deforestation, climate change, and negative impacts on indigenous communities. This pressure has led some governments, notably in the EU, US, and UK, to restrict the import of commodities that violate national law.<sup>40</sup> There is emerging a standard for corporations to undertake due diligence ensuring no commodities enter supply chains that violate national law. Voluntary standards are also emerging with certain commodities – especially oil palm and forestry products – offering certification to help consumers choose products that meet even higher requirements than the law requires. These efforts have been particularly effective in applying pressure on companies vulnerable to consumer boycotts or shareholder actions. These certification processes increasingly require communities to give their ‘free, prior and informed’ consent not only to the acquisition of land, but to all aspects of company operations.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, the Papuan people, in particular women, have for decades withstood tides of exploitation and loss inflicted by various governments. These governments, from the time of the Dutch, through the New Order, to the *Reformasi*, have ignored local ownership and leased land to resource extraction companies. The destructive practices undertaken by these companies ignore the value of the land and forests to local communities. Diverse forests have been converted into monoculture plantations for the production of commodities for a global market, while local women struggle to survive. But women are resilient survivors and continue to sow seeds of hope and to make their voices heard to proclaim their right to dignity and prosperity.

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<sup>40</sup> For example, GroIntelligence.com, 26 September 2019, “Palm Oil Sparks EU-Indonesia Trade War,” <gro-intelligence.com/insights/articles/palm-oil-sparks-eu-indonesia-trade-war>; CNN, 1 October 2020, “US restricts palm oil imports from Malaysia over alleged forced labor abuses,” <www.cbs58.com/news/us-restricts-palm-oil-imports-from-malaysia-over-alleged-forced-labor-abuses>.

<sup>41</sup> See the recently updated performance standards for RSPO on FPIC for oil palm <rspo.org/library/lib\_files/preview/1079>, and Forest Stewardship Council (which certifies timber and paper products) has been advancing a new set of guidelines on FPIC <fsc.org/en/document-centre/documents/resource/332>.

# Listening to Indigenous Women's Voices





Photos taken during our research in Unurum Guay.  
Photos by AJAR/PWG team, late 2019.





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# 5

## Jayapura Regency: The Disappearance of Traditional Forests in Unurum Guay

*Now it is so hard, I cannot get anything from there. All that I can do is cry. The first time the forest was cleared, before palm oil had been planted, it looked so beautiful. After the trees were cut down, after we had stood there, it felt as if our hearts had been torn apart. We felt it as if it was our own bodies, it felt like our heads had been shaved bald, all of it had been destroyed. The forest is no more, all of it has disappeared. UP*

In late 2019, the AJAR team, together with ELSHAM Papua, facilitated a process of participatory action research, or PAR, in Garusa village, situated in the district of Unurum Guay, to explore land conflict and its impact on the lives of indigenous women. Of the 16 women who participated in the process, most were from the Oria tribe, and had encountered conflict over their land and forests. As with other case studies in the project, PAR involved interviews, community mapping, resource mapping, timelines, and the stone and flower exercise.

## Unurum Guay and indigenous communities

The district of Unurum Guay covers an area of 193,160 ha, of which 75,650 ha, or almost 40% of the total area, belongs to the village of Garusa.<sup>1</sup> As well as having the largest population, Garusa has the largest forested area in the district, covering some 24,445 ha.<sup>2</sup> It is an elevated region with a vast river system running through land owned by indigenous groups, including the Ters, Manoa, and Jek clans.

Many people in Unurum Guay depend on produce they gather from the forest, and all the women in this research grow vegetables and harvest forest products to supplement their family income. They express a great desire to protect the forest and natural environment for future generations. Gardening provides food security when other sources of income are scarce:

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<sup>1</sup> Jayapura Regency Central Bureau of Statistics, “Kecamatan Unurum Guay District Dalam Angka 2018,” <jayapurakab.bps.go.id/publication/2018/09/26/409fcf5f96aa23c0972375b5/kecamatan-unurum-guay-dalam-angka-2018.html>.

<sup>2</sup> A. Bayage, 17 August 2019, “20 Desa Dengan Wilayah Hutan Terluas Dalam Konsesi di Papua dan Papua Barat,” Suarapapua.com, <suarapapua.com/2019/08/17/20-desa-dengan-wilayah-hutan-terluas-dalam-konsesi-di-papua-dan-papua-barat/>.

*My husband is very diligent working the garden and planting vegetables and betel nut. He says, "Honey, you can just take vegetables from the garden". Even if we cannot sell them, we can eat them ourselves. UN*

*We grow bananas. We can sell them, but if there is no rice at home then we can also eat them ... We certainly have to protect nature. There are various kinds of animals; both above the surface and hidden below the earth. I like to argue with other people. Not just anyone can enter my river to poison the fish. I have to protect [the nature] for the future of my three children. UM*

After palm oil plantations were established on their customary land, women still had to continue supplementing the income their husbands received as day laborers on the plantations:

*There are only two of us, it's only me who works, my husband doesn't help cutting wood or fetching water. He doesn't help, the only thing he knows how to do is eat. It is only me who finds food. He just looks for a wage. Sometimes he gives me money, sometimes not. Now he has started working for the company as a day-labourer. UK*

*My husband works in the palm oil plantation. Normally he gets 1 or 2 million rupiah as a labourer. I normally collect stones, when I get 1 ret (3 cubic metres), I usually sell it for Rp700,000. It's just me who does this work ... a pile of betel nut is Rp10,000, and I usually can make 100,000 rupiah ... a bunch of bananas can be sold for Rp20,000. A big woven bag (noken) can be sold for Rp300,000, 150,000 rupiah for a small one. I can normally get five pieces in one month and the community here buys it. Sayur Lilin [a type of asparagus] can normally be sold for Rp10,000, I take it from the garden, I grow it there ... the income for harvesting sago is Rp300,000. UO talking about her livelihood*

Indigenous women in Unurum Guay have already begun to taste the sweetness of emancipation. They are active in both social and religious activities. Several women become cadres in their community giving them higher incomes:

*Integrated Health Care cadres get Rp300,000 every six months, or Rp600,000 per year. There is Rp3.5 million worth of village funds which is divided among five people, one person receiving Rp700,000 every six months. There is annual funding from the regency, Rp300,000 is given out in December.* UP

*I have worked at a school as a casual teacher for ten years. The monthly wage is Rp150,000, funded by the School Operations Support Program, but I am usually paid every three months. There is Rp300,000 from the Department, so I usually receive Rp450,000 per month. There is also money allocated from the Village Fund to encourage work. If there is assistance, I can receive Rp7 million.* UM

## Women and the Various Social Issues in Unurum Guay District

During the participatory research process in Garusa village, it became clear that indigenous women face a number of challenges. Access to basic education is a central issue yet to be resolved. According to a 2020 report by the Jayapura Central Bureau of Statistics, there is neither a Senior High School or a Vocational School in the district.<sup>3</sup> Garusa village, the largest village in the district, only has one state Primary School and one Junior High School.<sup>4</sup> PAR participants explained that they were forced to leave school either because there were no teachers or because their families were unable to pay fees for schools outside the village:

*I didn't go to school because at the time there were no teachers. My father went to the forest ... my parents were accused of being part of the Papuan Independence Organisation (OPM), so we lived in the forest, Sokoata old village. We did not go to school.* UH

*I was studying in 2015 but had to leave because of issues with the fees. My biggest hope is to return to the studies that I had to abandon.* UA

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<sup>3</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Jayapura, *Kecamatan Unurum Guay Dalam Angka* (Jayapura: BPS, 2020), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 30.



Some of them were forced to leave school because they fell pregnant before completing their education:

*When I finished primary school, I applied for junior high school, but I fell pregnant so had to return home. I wanted to finish (school), but my parents did not want me to; I was married off. I didn't want to get married so quickly at that time ... but my parents did not want me to continue my education. I feel disappointed because I have friends who went to school.* UG

*I started Senior High School in 2006 but only grades 1 and 2. I didn't finish because I had a relationship and fell pregnant. That boy did not take on his responsibilities. I returned home to this village. I want to finish (school) but my mother has passed away, so people say there is no need ... I had so many dreams [continuing my study], but they all failed. We face so many obstacles trying to go to school. I am already married, just a housewife.* UI

Many women leave school because they are forced into marriage by their parents while they are still very young:

*My parents forced me into marriage when I was in second grade, Primary School. The forced marriage made me ashamed. Despite that, I have never felt anger towards my husband.* UF

*When I was 17 in the fifth grade Primary School, my parents brought me here (to Garusa village) and I was married. They said that I had to be married. My sibling said that I should not go to school. The fact is, I still want to go to school.* UL

*When I was young, I went with my parents to the forest. I was subject to an arranged marriage ... I had a boyfriend, but my parents wanted an arranged marriage, so I just went along with it.* UN

*My father asked me to go to the forest, so I did not go to school. Every day we would harvest and process sago. My father did not give me the freedom to go to school. My father was very traditional. My first marriage was with a boy, but he has since passed away ... I was married when I was still young.* UO

Another issue in Garusa village relates to domestic life. A number of participants explained that they do not have a harmonious life at home:

*There are only two of us, it's only me who works, my husband doesn't help cutting wood or fetching water. He doesn't help, the only thing he knows is how to eat. It is only me who finds food. He just looks for wages. Sometimes he gives me money, sometimes not ... in my family, I am always arguing with my husband, it never ends. UK.*

*In my house I usually argue with my husband, and my children are with relatives. I hope that in the new year there is no more arguing. UL*

A number of women mentioned that they experienced domestic violence:

*My mother remarried after my father passed away ... my stepfather always scolded us. Work came before food. If there was no work, there was no food. My mother passed away when my younger sibling was still young, so I raised my younger sibling. We lived in an angry home. We moved from one house to another because we were orphaned. UM*

*There is no violence in the household with my new husband. There was in the past, with my former husband. But let it be, that was then. Now we live happily. UO*

*I have experienced violence in the household. UD*

Violence against women in this village is influenced by the consumption of alcohol which has also made Garusa village unsafe:

*... all around us there is violence, especially these days. When there is a holiday there is usually chaos. If you go alone by motorbike, you will come across a drunk person. I was attacked when I was following my older sibling, but I had fallen behind. I came across a drunk person, they grabbed the motorbike from behind. They threw me down, luckily there was someone to help. UA*

*Now if there are drunk people, the police raise up their hands. It makes the young people scared. UP*

## The expansion of palm oil plantations and the process of land acquisition

The district of Jayapura was considered promising as a potential centre for palm oil in Papua. This was especially true after two giants of agribusiness established plantations in the area – the SM Group and the RGM Group.<sup>5</sup> A pioneer of palm oil in Jayapura is a subsidiary of SM, called PT. SKIP, which began operations in 1994.

Initially, PT. SKIP gave only Rp11 million to each clan, with the promise that all clans will receive 0.5% of the profits. PT. SKIP insisted that the allocation of funds had to be administered via the plasma cooperation scheme.<sup>6</sup> However, 55 traditional landowners have never received a share of the profits. In 2011 and 2012, residents protested by blocking access to the newly opened site. They demanded Rp50 billion as compensation for 12,000 hectares of plantation land, only a fraction of the total 22,000 ha.<sup>7</sup>

Another palm oil company in Jayapura is PT. RML, a part of the RGM Group. PT. RML was granted permits in the 1990s. Although the permits were for the district of Unurum Guay, PT. RML began clearing land and planting palm oil in 2010 on the traditional lands of the Jek, Ters, Supra, Manoa, and Dies clans.<sup>8</sup>

Research participants explained that PT. RML tried to buy support of indigenous communities by distributing payments. When participants created timelines, it became clear that in 2010 PT. RML distributed ‘compensation for crops planted’ totalling some Rp8.7 billion to 14 traditional leaders for an area covering 22,000 ha. In addition, PT. RML made empty promises to

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<sup>5</sup> A. Elisabeth, 15 September 2018, “Alex Waisimon Pahlawan Keragaman Hayati dari Papua,” <[www.mongabay.co.id/2018/09/15/alex-waisimon-pahlawan-keragaman-hayati-dari-papua/](http://www.mongabay.co.id/2018/09/15/alex-waisimon-pahlawan-keragaman-hayati-dari-papua/)>.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Plasma’ refers to ‘plasma garden’ or ‘*kebun plasma*’. These are small-plot farms developed alongside larger palm oil plantations. According to the scheme, these small-plot farms are supposed to be established and then given to communities by large corporations. The term derives from a model developed in the 1980s in which small ‘plasma’ would be included within a larger ‘nucleus’ corporate plantation. Source: Afrizal. “The Trouble with Palm Oil.” *Inside Indonesia* 98, (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Y. L. Franky and S. Moran, *The Papua Palm Oil Atlas* (Jakarta, Pusaka: 2015) 25-27.

<sup>8</sup> Information provided during interview with UP.

indigenous leaders who agreed to relinquish their traditional lands to the company. To date, these promises have not been honoured by the company:

*There were already promises [from the company] that our children would receive schooling. Another example was houses for traditional owners. Owners would get the right to good housing and schooling for our children. Then, the company would look after the old people. But to this day, it has never happened. That's why at that time our elders thought, 'ah, they are going to look after our wellbeing'. At the time, if I'm not mistaken, some of us said that palm oil companies have never provided welfare for a community, it was just a ruse. But, because at that time, the elders or ondoafi, said that they would go to Riau and carry out a comparative study. There were promises, promises that had been signed off. They are in a big book, a big document. However, the document only has the signatures of three of the big leaders (ondo besar). The big leader (ondoafi besar) from here had already passed away, as well as the one from Suma. There was no deforestation at that time, it was still in the process phase. That was the promise that the company gave, UA*

*I still carry the burden of persuading this village. The company representatives have never fulfilled the promises that they made to the elders. Meanwhile, many of the elders have passed away. UE*

In order to get support from the community, PT. RML promised to provide four hectares of land for plasma farms, with a note that three hectares would be given to the head of each family, and the remaining hectare would be managed by a cooperative.<sup>9</sup> In reality, only the plasma farms have been managed by cooperatives. Proceeds from the sale of palm oil goes to the cooperative, and members of the cooperation receive a mere Rp300,000 rupiah per family head every three months. However, this payment has only been received once in 2018, and once in 2019, after the community pressured the company. The owners of plasma farms in Garusa have therefore only received a total of Rp600,000 per family for palm oil they themselves manage.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Information gathered through community mapping.

<sup>10</sup> Information gathered through timeline activity.



While distributing plasma land, the company promised that the head of each family would receive individual certificates for the land they managed. However, individual certificates were never received. Instead, the agreement was changed so that a single communal certificate would be granted to be managed by a cooperative. The plasma farmers rejected this change as it was decided without their prior consent. In April 2017, indigenous communities asked the company to return 4,400 ha of plasma land that had been taken from the rightful owners. They demanded communal certificates be converted to individual certificates.

A company representative, acting for the branch leadership council for PT. RML, suggested that owners of plasma land write a letter revoking the right to cultivate land from the cooperative and returning the right to the company as the rightful owners of the plasma land. In relation to the land certificates, this representative stated the company had not provided certificates as there was not yet an agreement between the company, the cooperative and the traditional owners of the plasma land. The company would record all demands and forward them to PT. RML headquarters in Jakarta, in order that the demands are properly understood and can be responded to.

## The position of women in the management of customary land in Unurum Guay district

In Unurum Guay, women generally do not have the right to make decisions concerning customary land. The rights afforded to women are limited to land usage. Even if a woman is granted ownership to customary land, her rights cannot override men's. When asked to speak about customary lands, many women highlighted the difference between rights of men and women:

*The land upon which I garden was originally from my grandmother on my father's side. The land has already come under my ownership, but it can be taken by my grandmother's male relatives at any time, because we are from different clans. In general, the Dies clan believe women have no power. We are not considered, so I feel sad about this land. We're just tossed around. It is other people who have rights. UC*

*I feel that I can protect the land in my own way, but I cannot act because I am still young; I am not trusted because I am a woman. According to our traditions, women do not have rights. UP*

*I cannot challenge the leaders (ondo-ondo) because women have limited rights. It is the men who have rights. UB*

*Personally, I want to protect nature so that I can go fishing, farm, and collect stones. But I cannot challenge my male relatives and elders. As women, we cannot challenge ... I cannot challenge my elders because the rights of women do not exceed those of men, and I am also young. UA*

The position of women in making decisions about customary land in Garusa is further weakened by their status as newcomers, even though they married men from the village. They will only hold the right to use land while their husbands are alive:

*I don't have many rights here because it is not my clan's land. I am just here because of who I married. On my own land, I have to follow my male relatives. UG*

*The house and land are owned by my husband. I do not have the right because in Garusa I am just a daughter-in-law. UL*

*I do not have the right to speak [about land] because I only came here through marriage. UN*

This discriminative attitude towards women was clear when companies arrived in Unurum Guay and persuaded traditional leaders to give up their customary land. The traditional leaders did not afford the women the right to speak, because they believe that women are unable to comprehend issues relating to customary land. The voices of women were only considered when the company began treating the community unfairly:

*The first time that they [the company] came, a traditional ceremony was organised ... and the whole community attended. Once there, women were not given the right to speak, it did not happen. That is the reality, men never want to give women an opportunity to speak. Maybe later, when they have begun to feel the pain of the company's presence, they will hold a meeting in the village hall, with a representative, for example someone like me, from*

*the Supra ethnic group ... Normally, they will give us the opportunity [to speak] if we're having a meeting about plasma. But if it's like that, then it is only certain women like Mama UM who usually speak. According to the men's point of view, the [women's] speech will not make any sense, it will be all over the place and it will confuse the superiors in the front. Yet that isn't the case, women have points of view that they would like to share. Or they want the right to talk about the plantation. UE*

*In this land, men play the biggest role, they normally speak. "What do you, children, know? We, men, know better", even though we also have knowledge and education. Even though we also have the right to speak. UI*

Companies intentionally deny women an opportunity to speak during meetings between the company and the local community:

*Sometimes, representatives from the company will say that if a meeting is organised in the village, then discussions will not be productive. But many times, the meeting hasn't been here. Instead, it only involves certain people contacted by telephone or letter. They go inside and meet in the office of the palm oil company. UE*

Despite this, there are a number of women from Garusa brave enough to challenge this discrimination. They insist on being involved and heard during discussions about customary land. According to these women, they have the right to speak. These women tend to have independent incomes or are supported by their husbands or hold important positions in the clan:

*If it's personal, then we [women] are certainly not invited to speak. Women can only watch other people discussing issues. But I am also interested so I have to speak too. Finally, I started speaking. I spoke about what I have been feeling, many people were taken aback. UE*

*In relation to the right to speak, it is certainly very hard because men are so much higher than women. However, there are women who have the same qualities as the men and they usually challenge [them], "Why am I not given the right to speak? I also have rights". There are a number of women who do this, including me ... I have the right to my family's land because I am the first child ... I feel that women also have the right to speak, and this is a country with the rule of law, there are regulations [about free speech].*

*This does not mean that we want to have a rebellion, I'm only saying this because I want to defend our forest. I am the oldest woman from the Supra clan. I am going to defend what I have for the future of my younger brother and sisters. UG*

*I come from Garusa. Whatever the men speak about, I can also speak about. If the men are speaking and it isn't good, then I protest. If it's good, then I follow. People invite me if there is a meeting. I have children, I do not want any harm. UM, who works as a casual schoolteacher.*

*I have the right to the forest; I have the right to speak. Myself and my husband have the forest. The forest is for gardening; there is matoa there, so I defend it. UH*

These women revealed the sadness and disappointment that they feel about their elders and clan leaders' decision to relinquish customary land to companies:

*When I speak about this, it really breaks my heart and I feel so beaten down. I always remember how our parents were tricked maybe because they did not go to school. They would go down there [to the company's area] and block it with crosses. But representatives from the company or the manager would come [and say], "No need to do that, sir". They were tricked with payments of Rp500,000 or Rp100,000. The blockades were cleared, and the activities resumed. UE*

*I feel sad because the head of our clan was often cheated. It was because he didn't have a distrustful bone in his body. They were tricked so quickly by the people. Some takeaway rice or a packet of cigarettes, they were interested immediately. We as children are disappointed. Why did he hold those principles? He could have stood up to the managers. UB*

*Now it is so hard, I cannot get anything from there. All that I can do is cry. The first time the forest was cleared, before palm oil had been planted, it looked so beautiful. After the trees were cut down, after we had stood there, it felt as if our hearts had been torn apart. We felt it as if it was our own bodies, it felt like our heads had been shaved bald, all of it had been destroyed. The forest is no more, all of it has disappeared. As indigenous people, we usually walk there and tears begin to flow from our eyes as we think, "The*



*forest is destroyed and for nothing. There is nothing to show for it". We are still as we were before. I have a great-aunt who still lives there, and she still needs to search for food, she needs to go hunting to find food. There were promises, promise after promise began to arrive, "With this, you will live prosperously". Where is that prosperity? There is none. We are still the same as we were before, nothing has changed. Please, whoever can see, whoever can hear, whoever is like me, whoever wants to give up the forest for private estates or plantations, don't do it! Because you will feel the same as I do today, so extremely sad about the destruction which has taken place.*  
UP

## **Involvement of security forces in interactions between companies and indigenous communities**

During process of land conversion in Indonesia, and especially in Papua, it is not uncommon to see security forces involved. During this research we learned that companies usually involve security forces when dealing with indigenous communities. In particular when indigenous communities demand that companies fulfill their promises:

*The promises which the company gave to indigenous communities have not been realised. The community and traditional leaders have demanded that the deal which was agreed on be realised. They have faced threats from security personnel.* UP

*It is common for companies to invite [soldiers] because they know that if the community speaks, they will raise their voice, their tone will go very high, offending the company heads. There are leaders whose voices like that; they don't care, they said what's in their head in the front. Whether it make the company offended or not, they pointed their finger. There is a leader named Matias Manoa. This person is not weak. Whatever he wants to say, he says. He wanted to speak about the deception in front of the manager, so he said it.* UE.

Based on information provided by one source, special forces are usually involved in meetings between companies and local communities. The presence

of special forces is to send a message to residents who wish to resist companies moving onto their customary land:

*There are police, the District Command Army and even Special Forces. They usually attend [the meetings]. It feels like we were threatened. They [the communities' male members] do not want to speak about what is really in their hearts. Women are also not brave enough to speak because those people [security forces] are watching. UE.*

Not only do they work to silence residents' resistance towards the presence of palm oil plantations, but companies also involve security forces when indigenous communities raise concerns about their work as plantation labourers:

*[We] are not free from violence in our family or violence at work. For example, when there are meetings from the company, there will be always protection from Special Forces. When an employee complains about their wages, the manager calls the police and the police come. UG.*

The presence of security forces puts indigenous communities in a tight position. They are neither free to exercise their right to compensation for customary land taken by the company, nor to safely submit complaints about their work at the palm oil plantation:

*There has been violence here many times ... over there [at the company], if there is a problem, they bring the police. The community leaders always deal with the police. If the leaders are angry about plasma, they report to the police. We have rights, but we cannot make demands, we do not feel free to make demands. We are threatened by the police. Because of that, we cannot take action. If we think of carrying out a blockade there, we will certainly have to deal with the police. UP*

## The historical legacies of violence in Unurum Guay

Like many parts of Papua, Unurum Guay has a dark history. Between 1984 and 1993, there were Indonesian military operations on the east coast between Bonggo and Sarmi districts, close to Unurum Guay. These were connected to several incidents of violence that occurred in Jayapura.

The first incident of violence occurred in 1984 with the murder of a Papuan cultural icon, anthropologist, and popular broadcaster, Arnold Clemen Ap. Ap was arrested in 1983, and jailed and tortured by Indonesian Special Forces because he was suspected of being a sympathizer of the OPM, a Papuan independence movement.<sup>11</sup> It is believed that his celebration of Papuan culture and music challenged the central government's efforts to foster a spirit of Indonesian nationalism amongst Papuans. Women from Unurum Guay confirmed that after Ap's murder, people became afraid and fled the region. They gave collective testimonials and accounts of incidents that occurred during the special operations.

*In 1961, Indonesia entered [Papua] for the first time ... in 1962, the Dutch military colonized the people. The community fought back, killing three people: one policeman from Genyem, one policeman from Keerom, and one Dutch policeman. In the 1970s and 80s there were military operations. The people fled to the forest. Hobni Maware had his ears cut off. In 1977 Sadrak Maware, Piter Birom, and Yakobus Bargwe were killed by the armed forces. In 1969, Papua asked for independence, they were accused of participating in the [independence] struggle. In 1978 and 1979, there was development. There was construction of houses in Unurum Guay through the Presidential Assistance Program (Banpres), there were groceries, kitchen utensils, shovels, machetes. In 1970 and 1980, women experienced sexual violence by the military.<sup>12</sup>*

The second incident related to the military's pursuit of a former member of Company 171 Papuan Mobile Brigade, Eliezer Awom, who defected in 1983 and led OPM troops for five years. Between 1985 and 1986, several villages on the east coast were burned by special forces as a warning to Awom

<sup>11</sup> "Catatan Kelam: Operasi Militer Disertai Penyiksaan dan Kekerasan Seksual di Jayapura" Suara Papua, 17 March 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Taken from PAR timeline.

and other OPM members to surrender immediately. Before the burnings began, villagers were advised by OPM to flee to the forest.

*I forget the year; it was during the period of military operations. At the time we were still girls, my father was killed by the military in Kapcao Village in Sarmi. He was accused of being part of the separatist group. He ran to the old village over there, and they [the military] were calling for him. After that, they put a letter (for his arrest) in front of the post office at that night. My dad can't read, it was a Biak person who wrote the letters. That night they arrested him, they took him to the coconut trees, and they killed him with a gun. I have an aunty in Kapcao, we met her there, she whispered that the army had killed my dad. The military had soldiers there ... we lived suffering in Kapcao, we only had basic food. We were tired of boiling and roasting scallops. They buried my dad there. UK*

## Changes to the lives of indigenous communities following the entry of companies into the district of Unurum Guay

Indigenous communities in Unurum Guay rely on the forest as a source of livelihood, allowing them to make an income by selling wood and produce from their gardens. However, the government has begun to place restrictions on logging because of rampant deforestation, including the conversion of forests into palm oil plantations. This rampant deforestation threatens people's source of income and poses a greater risk of flooding:

*My husband only works logging timber to provide for our daily needs. He has seven chainsaws, people from the village come and help. If the wood is sold, the price is usually between Rp2 and 5 million for one cubic metre. We paid the owner Rp300,000 per cubic metre. Now there are five chainsaws left. The current price for one ret (three cubic metres) of ironwood is Rp20 million. If you go into the area it is Rp18 or 19 million because we need to pay the posts: police, soldiers, and the forestry department, normally one vehicle will cost Rp100,000. To be honest, I'm confused about who profits these days because the price for transportation is Rp1 million. That's before*



*you have paid for supplies, pay the operator, and you also need to send money to the wives of the men who are working. Before, all the timber here was ironwood, now there is no more. You have to travel very far to get it from the forest. The time it takes for ironwood to grow is also very long, possibly 20 years. The Regent placed a ban on these chainsaws, I don't know why. It continues anyway though because many houses need wood because of the last flood. UI*

Aside from satisfying local needs, logging is carried out in the district because of requests by companies to traditional leaders:

*Some members of the community do not want to give permission at all. But now it depends on the leaders because the company normally uses them. For example, "Here, you have some pocket money. Now you need to sign off on more logging". If the company asked every member of the community who has plasma rights to sign off on it, the majority would refuse. UA.*

The existence of companies has also seen the logging of a number of endemic species of plant such as Matoa trees. These endemic species have become a source of additional income for the indigenous community in Garusa:

*Now, all the matoa fruit has been cleared by excavators, it has already been destroyed. The community benefits from the produce, sells it in the city, matoa is really valuable. Although we bring sacks (of matoa), the buyers will come and they grab those after we take the sacks off from the vehicle, they pull it out from the sacks. It will not happen if we sell other things, such as bananas. The only natural product that we can sell quickly is matoa. During the matoa harvest, we go down to the road, the buyers will come down quickly and say, "You're selling them hey sis? What's the price?" The clearance of matoa fruit has caused us some loss, we, the indigenous community in this village, are always being mocked. UQ*

Loss of access to customary lands has had negative implications on the continuity of the Papuan way of life. This was raised in the testimonies of many informants who explained that they have experienced a significant decrease in income, coupled with the loss of staple foods:

*[I used to] sell genemo vegetables that I would take from the forest. But because the land has been taken by the company, I can no longer sell those. If my livelihood vanishes, I will have to just garden. UJ*

*The sago will disappear if the company comes in, so we have to protect it. If we still have the garden, we can still plant [crops], as long as all the land is not taken by the company. Our elders before us used to garden, they grew gedi vegetables, lilin and bananas. This current generation only relies on their husband to work. UE*

The decreased access to local staples has changed the lifestyles of the community, including patterns of consumption. Staple foods, such as sago, have been replaced by rice since the community's sago gardens were converted into palm oil plantations:

*But now we cannot harvest sago. We are lazy, affected by the big road. Before [we] only relied on sago but now that has changed, and we eat rice. UO*

The disappearance of their traditional forests has also meant that indigenous communities have found it hard to hunt like they used to:

*The difference today is that the hunting in those areas is difficult for my father. If he goes hunting, my father tends to go towards the beach. This is because there are still all the species of animal, [like] crocodiles. If people go to the mountain region, they won't catch crocodiles because they are in the coastal area. So over there are a lot of little ponds which is where the crocodiles are. My father collects the crocodile skins which he can sell. It is sold per ounce if I'm not mistaken. UA*

*The company has cleared where so much of our natural produce was. An example was this Christmas when our parents went out hunting for the holiday. But now there is nothing, the forest has been destroyed ... my dream is for us to get our forest back, get it back in its entirety. UE*

*There is a heavy burden which I still carry in this village. If my burden were a load, perhaps I have collapsed. The same thing happens in my household too, there will definitely be challenges in the future. This stone is also a symbol of the company's injustices because the elders cannot go hunting. UE*

Considering the various changes that have taken place in Unurum Guay, the presence of companies has not brought prosperity to the indigenous Oria community. Inequalities that the community continues to experience has made women more aware of their dependence on the natural environment, and the need to defend customary land:

*Just like that, the company called the men for a meeting. Why don't women have the right to talk about customary rights there? Why is it always men? Why are they allowed to step all over women's rights? What if a woman leaves one clan and joins another? ... why do our own families take away our rights? If we get married, we have to leave our clan and join another. That is what usually happens to those who are married out. It's true that if you are married out then your rights are allowed to be reduced. If you are married within your own village, that cannot happen in my opinion, we still have rights. In fact, I have protested this. Women must have the right to talk about their fundamental rights. We are usually walked all over, the right of women to speak about customary rights should not be reduced. Through that, maybe women will be afforded opportunities in the future. Women will have the right to discuss their fundamental rights. UQ*





A 10 year old child works with her grandmother in a palm oil plantation.  
Photo by Albertus Vembrianto, Boven Digeol.



6

**Boven Digoel district:  
indigenous communities in  
the midst of expanding palm  
oil plantations**





BE is 58 years old and lives in Subur Village with her husband. Although she was not raised there, her symbol is Subur because, “I followed my husband to Subur”.

In her garden, she grows bananas and durian, both for personal consumption. Her husband works for the village administration and receives Rp3 million every three months. On top of this, he hunts pig and deer.

Before the forest was cleared for palm oil plantations, she used to find food in the surrounding forest: “there were pigs, cassowary, and trees which could be used for wood, there was also cane. Nature provided everything we needed, that can be used to generate income. There were crocodiles, yellow birds, birds of paradise, all of them could be used to generate income. There were worms which were used for fishing. All of them were precious”.

According to her, if somebody was unwell, various medicines could be found in the forest: “there were leeches which would help us humans. Many of us had swollen feet, we would slice [leaves], place the leech there and it would suck out the bad blood. These small animals helped us humans and so all of them were precious. The company came and destroyed it all”.

The forests where she was raised have now been cleared for palm oil plantations, and the rivers where she fished are polluted: “the forest was taken by the company and I cried, I was so sad. I am so sad that that forest has been taken by the company...I cried the first time that I went to check it out. We didn’t know that a company had entered the forest, we didn’t know”.

In her view, life was better before palm oil companies arrived in Boven Digoel: “I feel that it was much better in the past. The company arrived...and now it is very different. In the past we were free, we went hunting and fishing, we used to feel safe. Then, the company came. Now it is different from the past”.

In late 2019, AJAR, together with eL-AdPPer, conducted PAR with 20 indigenous women from Boven Digoel. The women were from the Muyu, Mandobo, and Awuyu clans. The PAR involved group discussions, interviews, community mapping exercises, timeline setting, resource mapping, and the stone and flower activity. The research was conducted in Subur and Aiwat villages in Subur district, and Anggai village in Jair district.

## An overview of the region

Boven Digoel is located in the southeast corner of Papua. This district was established through the expansion of Merauke under Law Number 26 of 2002.

Christianity has played a large part in this area. According to the local communities, Christian missionaries began to arrive in the 1930s, which is when the first baptism took place. During the Dutch Colonial period, Boven Digoel was known as ‘Digoel Atas’ (Upper Digoel) because it was located next to the Digoel Hilir River.<sup>1</sup> In 1927, General De Graeff used Boven Digoel as an internment camp for leaders of the Indonesian struggle for independence.<sup>2</sup> Digoel was surrounded by jungles, with towering trees, making escape virtually impossible. In the 1930s, both Mohammad Hatta and Sutan Sjahrir were detained in Boven Digoel. These men went on to become the first Prime Minister and Vice President of Indonesia respectively, following the declaration of independence in 1945.<sup>3</sup>

## Subur village

Between 1970 and 1973, the Indonesian government consolidated the Biantap, Terek, and Naggu villages into Subur village. A decade later, the government returned to Subur and distributed farming equipment, including shovels, hoes, and machetes. The government provided clove, cacao, coffee, and langsung seeds to the local community. In 2000, the village was granted funding under the ‘National Respect Program for the Self-Empowerment of Communities’ or *PNMP Mandiri-Respek*. Through the program, residents built semi-permanent houses and roads, received diesel-powered electricity, and purchased rubber machines. As well as the government, the Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Cribb, “Convict Exile and Penal Settlement in Colonial Indonesia,” *Journal of Colonialism & Colonial History* 18, no. 3 (2017), 6.

<sup>3</sup> “Menguak Boven Digoel Tempat Bung Hatta Diisolasi Era Kolonial Belanda,” *Portal Informasi Indonesia*, 30 September 2019, <[www.indonesia.go.id/ragam/budaya/ekonomi/menguak-boven-digoel-tempat-bung-hatta-diisolasi-era-kolonial-belanda](http://www.indonesia.go.id/ragam/budaya/ekonomi/menguak-boven-digoel-tempat-bung-hatta-diisolasi-era-kolonial-belanda)>.

Church played a role in the development of Subur. In 1974, the first Catholic school, ‘St. Theresa Catholic Primary School’, was constructed. St. Joseph Church was then opened eight years later. In 2015, a traditional ritual was held in Dufal to memorialise the entry of the Catholic church into the village. Four years later, on 28 November 2019, an event was held in Subur to mark the first member of the Mandobo ethnic group being baptised into the Catholic Church.

## Aiwat Village

Aiwat village emerged as a result of the expansion of ‘Wat-Wake’ village. This expansion took place in 1973, after conflict between the Mandobo and Marind clans. The origin of the word ‘Aiwat’ means ‘betel nut pouch’ and was left behind after this period of conflict. In 1976, Tarsisius Derin was elected the first village head of Aiwat. In the same year, the first Catholic church, ‘St. Maria Catholic Church of Aiwat’ was constructed.

## Anggai Village

Anggai Village is located beside the Digul and Kao Rivers. It was established in 1961 by consolidating three separate villages and remains a peaceful part of the Awuyu region. The village is bordered on the east by the Kikano River. To the south, it is bound by the Sio Lake, the traditional land of the Amnagi and Mianggi clans. Next to the Kalikao River are forests and birds protected by the Mandobo and Awuyu groups. Like Subur, Anggai experienced a period of development after receiving financial assistance. In 2000, the government allocated funding through ‘Presidential Instruction for Underdeveloped Villages’ (*Inpres Desa Tertinggal*) to develop plantations and provide a variety of long and short-term crops. Ten years later, Anggai received financial assistance from *PNMP Mandiri-Respek* for the construction of residential homes.



## Boven Digoel communities' connection to the natural environment

The communities who reside in these three villages have an intimate connection to the natural environment. During discussions, all chose a symbol from nature to best represent their daily lives. Sago was the most frequently chosen symbol, demonstrating its importance as a staple food:

*My symbol is sago because my mother fed me sago while I was growing up. My parents raised us on the products of the forest; sago, sago worms, genemo shoots ... my husband and I live from nature; I process sago, my husband hunts. I raise my children on sago. Until today, I still harvest sago.* BD

*[My symbol is] sago because I get my food from the sago, because I was brought up on sago. I still feed my kids sago and products from nature.* BO  
*We raised our children relying only on nature. All have succeeded, all went to school (and) finished, some have gone abroad. This was because we harvested sago without assistance from anybody else.* BG

As well as sago, many participants chose nature as the symbol which most represents them:

*My parents were farmers. They still depend on nature. So, my identity is the river, I am still one with nature. I was raised on food from nature, fish, pig, turtle. Us Awuyu people do not farm, we live from the products of nature.* BR

*[My symbol is] the garden. Every day I go to the garden, I till the earth because it makes mother [nature] happy, I am not going anywhere.* BK

*[My symbol is] land and the garden because I love the land. Days turn into weeks, months and years, I just work, I just garden.* BS

Their intimate connection with the natural environment is also evident in their ability to read natural signs and use them to guide their farming:

*Before, the environment showed us many natural signs. We would listen to the sounds of birds that marked the hot season ... The birds are able to give*

*us signs ... When many birds raise their sound at the same time, they signal the hot season. BG*

*I farm using natural fertiliser, I use decomposed grass and branches. I gather it in an empty drum and burn it, then the dust can be used for farming. The dust is scattered among the crops to get rid of pests. For the Muyu clan, there are signs from nature. If you come and there are strong winds, then bananas should be planted. BS*

As well as being a place to grow crops, indigenous communities rely on traditional forests to hunt various species of wild animal. Hunting has remained a key source of livelihood for communities in these villages, even after the operation of companies in the region:

*When I was a year old, my mother passed away; it was only my father who raised me. My father raised me, [we] lived with nature. [We] hunted pig, cassowary, crocodile; I ate it all. There was also farming. My father provided me food this way until I was 5 years old. BM*

*I hunt for pigs using dogs, if you're lucky you can catch two per week. There have been times where there have been none. The pork is roasted to be sold in Prabu village [for] Rp20,000 to 30,000 per serve. Travelling to Prabu by longboat costs Rp100,000 per person. The pork can be turned into jerky. If the company employees have just been given their wage, I can increase the price of pork to Rp50,000 per serve. BB*

As well as hunting, fishing is a key source of livelihood for the local communities given the number of rivers which flow past their villages:

*I fish for shrimp. Usually I can catch one turtle per day, I normally sell it for Rp30,000 per kilo. So, every time I can catch 20 kilos, I make Rp600,000. So, per month I make around Rp4 million. BL*

*[My symbol is] the Kio River. We eat from the products of the river. Our parents raised us by catching fish and shrimp in the river. BN*

## Women's access to education in Boven Digoel

During discussions, access to education emerged as one of the more pressing issues faced by indigenous communities. Limited access to basic education is an issue which communities in Boven Digoel have faced since the 1970s. According to the Ministry for Education and Culture, Jair District has 14 primary schools, four junior high schools, one senior high school, and one vocational school. Subur district has even less, with only four primary schools, one junior high school, one vocational school, and no senior high schools.<sup>4</sup>

*In 1972 I started school. The teachers were not always available to teach, so I could only finish my study in 1982. After I graduated, my mother fell ill. I had a younger sibling who was only 2 years old. My father took care of my mother, so I had to look after my younger sibling until my mother passed away. In 1982, my father passed away. BL*

*I am a casual teacher, but there is not a lot of progress with education. The village government does not pay attention to school. The village government usually expels the teacher from school. So, school cannot carry on. Teachers are threatened and expelled, that's why it is hard for teachers to carry out their duty at St. Petrus primary school. BN*

In addition to a lack of teachers and minimal attention given to education, many female students are unable to complete their schooling because their parents have passed away. Many are also forced to leave school to take care of their parents who have become frail:

*It was just us two daughters. When we were still little kids, our mother and father passed away. We both were separated ... we had relatives to raise us until school. I only went to primary school, [and] left in 1993. BP*

*I only [studied] up to the second grade of junior high school. My parents were already old, so I left school. BM*

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<sup>4</sup> Pusat Data Dan Teknologi Informasi Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, *Jumlah Data Satuan Pendidikan (Sekolah) Per Kabupaten/Kota: Kab. Boven Digoel* <referensi.data.kemdikbud.go.id/index11.php?kode=251300&level=2>.

*I wanted to continue my studies, but there was no support from my relatives. My parents had already passed away, both father and mother. BH*

Financial limitations are central hampering the ability of parents to provide their daughters with higher education outside the region. This is compounded by the fact that Boven Digoel does not have any higher education institutions or universities:

*I only went to primary school until grade 5 ... there was no support or assistance from my parents even though I wanted to study. BT*

*I wanted to continue my studies but there was no money. There was nobody who wanted to pay for my schooling. BI*

*I left vocational school in 2016. My dream is to study in 2020 ... there is no support or assistance from my family even though I want to continue my studies at university. BJ*

## The presence of extractive industries in Boven Digoel

Companies have been operating in Boven Digoel for decades. One of the first to begin operations was the South Korean corporation PT. KG, which obtained logging concessions in the early 1990s, eventually dominating the lucrative plywood industry.<sup>5</sup> Since 1994, this company has been logging meranti and merbau wood, and has established a ‘triplex’ factory to process timber. In 1998, PT. KG was able to obtain licenses to establish palm oil plantations in two of its concession areas near Asiki on the traditional lands of the Mandobo ethnic group.<sup>6</sup> Between 2009 and 2014, PT. KG successfully obtained licences from the government for an area of land in Merauke and Boven Digoel, twice the size of Seoul.<sup>7</sup> After obtaining these permits, PT.

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<sup>5</sup> Y. L. Franky and S. Moran, *Atlas Sawit Papua* (Jakarta: Pusaka, 2015), 54.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The Gecko Project and Mongabay, 25 June 2020, “The Consultant: Why did a palm oil conglomerate pay \$22m to an unnamed ‘expert’ in Papua?,” </news.mongabay.com/2020/06/the-consultant-why-did-a-palm-oil-conglomerate-pay-22m-to-an-unnamed-expert-in-papua/>.



KG became a conglomerate controlling the largest area of land in Papua.<sup>8</sup> Much of PT. KG's operations in Boven Digoel are carried out via subsidiaries like PT. TS and PT. BCA.

Another South Korean company operating in Boven Digoel is PT. BIA. A large South Korean corporation established PT. BIA and PT. PAL in 2006, the largest shareholder being the director of the Indonesian branch of this large South Korean corporation.<sup>9</sup> PT. BIA and PT. PAL were initially granted permits in 2007 by the Merauke District Head, Johannes Gebze. These were extended by his successor, Romanus Mbaraka.<sup>10</sup> In 2011, the largest shareholder of PT. BIA sold his majority stake to a South Korean conglomerate called the PG Group as the large South Korean corporation was facing bankruptcy.<sup>11</sup> Over the next two years, he sold PT. PAL to the KG Group although there are suspicions that the KG Group had been in control of PT. PAL since 2009.<sup>12</sup> PT. PAL is itself a 'shell company'<sup>13</sup> which has palm oil plantations in Merauke, and a special terminal port in Jair.<sup>14</sup>

Another company operating is the MG Group.<sup>15</sup> In 2013, the MG Group obtained land concessions in Boven Digoel totalling some 400,000 ha on the traditional land of the Awuyu, including vast swathes of pristine forest.<sup>16</sup> After securing these concessions, MG began to sell off land to a range of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Awas MIFEE, 25 November 2015, "Merauke Burns – but were the plantations to blame?," *West Papua Media*, <westpapuamedia.info/tag/pt-bio-inti-agrindo/>.

<sup>12</sup> The Gecko Project and Mongabay.

<sup>13</sup> A 'shell company' is an entity which is formed to legally protect or hide a company's assets. Shell companies do not operate as a normal business and they do not generate assets. This is because they are formed so that another company can control or hide its assets. Shell companies can also provide a face for illegal transactions. Source: <www.thestreet.com/personal-finance/education/what-is-a-shell-company-14908714>.

<sup>14</sup> Dinas Penanaman Modal dan Pelayanan Terpadu Satu Pintu Kabupaten Boven Digoel, 2017, "Data LPPD Tahun 2017," *Pemerintah Kabupaten Boven Digoel*, <opd.bovendigoelkab.go.id/uploads/Dinas%20Penanaman%20Modal%20dan%20PTSP/LPPD%20DPMPTSP%202017.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Y. L. Franky and S. Moran, *Atlas Sawit Papua* (Jakarta: Pusaka, 2015), 54.

<sup>16</sup> Felix Amias, 23 May 2013, "Suku Auyu Terancam Kehilangan Hutan Alam Demi Kelapa Sawit," *Awes Miffee*, <awasmiffee.potager.org/?p=338>.

corporations, many of which are foreign-owned.<sup>17</sup> PT. MJR, a subsidiary of the MG Group, currently holds 39,505 ha, including concessions in Anggai village. Meanwhile, MG itself holds 280,000 ha, more than four times the size of Jakarta.<sup>18</sup>

## Process of land acquisition

In 2012 a process of ‘socialisation’ was carried out by the MG Group in an attempt to garner community support. More than 180 people from the Afu, Woboi, and Hobuang clans attended this event. Representatives from the company told residents of Meto village they were clearing 40 ha for oil palm. During this process, company representatives handed out pigs, foodstuffs, and envelopes of money, seen as ‘payments of good faith’. They handed around documents and asked for people’s signatures. Some months later, the community realised that the paper they had signed was a referral transferring their customary land to the company.

Because they felt lied to, residents refused to accept the company, citing the broken promises to provide schools or health facilities. In 2017, the company’s permit was revoked by the Governor and given to PT. PDS and PT. PDA, subsidiaries of a company owned by a head of the Democratic Party. On 24 August 2017, the land owned by six clans was transferred to an unknown Korean company. The area transferred to this company is a protected area of Wasur National Park, zoned for ‘Industrial Forestation’. There are concerns that the land will be turned into palm oil plantations.<sup>19</sup>

Our research found that many companies in this part of Boven Digoel will often begin operations by promising a higher standard of living for local communities, while distributing basic necessities. But promises of a better standard of living are rarely fulfilled and the distribution of basic commodities soon ceases:

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<sup>17</sup> Y. L. Franky and S. Moran, *Atlas Sawit Papua* (Jakarta: Pusaka, 2015), 56.

<sup>18</sup> Information provided through PAR.

<sup>19</sup> Information was gathered through PAR activities.

*The company made many promises to us, especially those who were landowners. They promised that we would get housing, clean water, and monthly social services. We thought that it was true, so we said okay. We started to look to the future, such as groceries, they had already given us 15 kgs. There was sugar, coffee, tea, but then it began to decrease ... The company promised us houses, until today it has just been promise upon promise and they still haven't answered us. The clean water they promised, that hasn't come either. BC*

*This company really deceived us. Our elders, they went down there. There was a piece of writing [but] our elders cannot read very well. They hid the writing at the top, while the elders only signed at the bottom but didn't know what was written on the hidden part. So, the company just tricked us like that. They gave us foodstuff like Mama BC was just saying, 15 kilos of rice and just one container of milk. How are we supposed to provide for the needs of our family with a container of milk? A kilo of sugar, one box of Sariwangi tea leaves and the carton of instant noodles is what they usually provide. BA*

The company promised to provide financial assistance for education. However, the distribution of this assistance was discriminative and only directed to boys. In addition, the company imposes penalties on students unable to complete their studies:

*They [the company] provided money, scholarships for children. My child also received [the scholarship]. A little bit later they broke it off. They called us together, they said that as of that day, women do not hold rights [and] the children of women also do not hold rights. All were suspended. Then, more assistance came from the company. They said it was assistance for education. So, my child entered, went to register at the District Military Command. I accompanied them going there, we all sat inside until the end. I didn't see it, I didn't read, but it was written that if a child leaves school, the parents have to pay Rp40 million. Even though I thought the company owed me a debt, I didn't demand it ... So, at first, we thought the company was good. As it turns out, we have realised that it is not good. We, women, no longer have rights, it's only the men. BC*

*It was from the company; they ended the children's scholarships, they said women are forbidden. [The company said] that assistance is not allowed to be given to women who have children, only men. But they will only give to a boy, although men have two or three sons ... It is unfair because women do not receive the scholarships. The children of women cannot receive scholarships, only the men are approved. BA*

*The company does not consider us. [We] went to request scholarships [and] foodstuffs. They told us women that we do not have rights. But the government has given us the right to be cadre. I think the government provides a little bit. So, I don't blame the government, I blame the company. BL*

A common practice in the company's relations with the community relations is the distribution of money. While 'payments of good faith' are common during the initial phases of socialisation, companies like PT. KG and the MG Group often distribute money to the different clans whose land they wish to operate upon. When PT. MJR began clearing land in Boven Digoel, they gave the Yame clan less than Rp400,000. Many people were excluded from this distribution of funds, especially women. In 2012, PT. BCA gave the Tomba clan Rp10 million in exchange for their traditional lands. As one woman explained, this amount was then divided among all members of the clan:

*At that time, my father only received Rp500,000. I said, "Gosh! This is Rp500,000, what are we going to do with it?" I felt so sorry, we used to own so much land, but it's gone. BA*

To actually get the money out of the company caused further suffering:

*We went [to get the money], the company gave it via an ATM card. When we went there to take it out as usual, we opened it up first and after that we saw the amount. It was only Rp100,000 or Rp200,000. We're used to leaving Rp100,000 to maintain the balance, so we only took out Rp100,000, it was like that. The ticket from here to there was Rp100,000. We paid for the ticket [for transportation] and came home with nothing. BA*

Extractive industries in Boven Digoel are underpinned by an alliance of state and corporate power. Over the past 20 years, a number of reports



have shown the direct use of the military by PT. KG. In 2004, PT. KG had a number of formal and informal ‘security’ deals with the military.<sup>20</sup> Further, a 2009 report showed PT. KG had 12 military posts inside its concessions in Boven Digoel.<sup>21</sup>

*The community doesn’t know how much of the forest has been destroyed, we want to go and step in, but we can’t because behind the company is the military. At the front is the company and behind is the Mobile Brigade Corps. The military threatens and intimidates; they don’t try to ask, they only demand to be followed.*

## Experiences of women plantation workers

A number of women from Boven Digoel began working for companies like PT. MJR, which have palm oil concessions on their customary land. In 2013, BN began working for PT. MJR after a representative from the company went from house to house seeking manual labourers. Together with other women, she worked in the nursery of the plantation, where she was involved in germinating seeds and raising seedlings. Plantation workers face tough and dangerous working conditions, and the company does not provide personal protection equipment.

*I worked there, but from the very start face masks were not given. The complete package [of personal protective equipment] was not available, there were no gloves. Work equipment had not been provided by representatives from the company, it was still manual. BN*

*Until today, I still work [there]. I work in the nursery section, taking care of the small seedlings. The wage is Rp2 million to Rp3 million, based on attendance. It is seven hours work per day, from 7am to 2pm. I bring my own food. The company used to provide equipment: work boots, socks, gloves, masks. Now you have to buy it yourself from the kiosk. I have now worked [there] for almost eight years. BP*

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<sup>20</sup> Y. L. Franky and S. Moran, *Atlas Sawit Papua* (Jakarta: Pusaka, 2015), 54-55.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Similarly, BM spoke of the dangerous working conditions she faced. She was ordered to work overtime without breaks while being paid a very low wage:

*I worked at the company, but only for one year because I met my partner and because of personal safety. I worked in the composer section, the machine which stacks the triplex plywood. Working at midday was good, if I worked at night I would get drowsy. I got electrocuted by exposed cables. When it happened, I felt it affecting my heart. I worked from 7pm until 7am the next day. If there was overtime, I would continue working from 7am to 7pm, then resume again to 7am the next day. I stood when I was working. If I worked hard, the wage was Rp700,000, it could be as low as Rp300,000, Rp400,000, even Rp50,000 rupiah ... The company closed down on 20 November because all the wood had been used. My last payment is this December.*

For BN and other women, the most dangerous aspect of working in the plantation stemmed from the use of dangerous fertilizers:

*So, when I was working, I myself got sick from the fertilizer. The most dangerous fertiliser that they use is Dolomite, NPK 35, NPK 25, [and] Anderson. These fertilizers that they use are basic fertilizers for when plants first begin to sprout. At that stage they are in polybags, this is when they are first covered in fertilizer. I am also a victim of the company, I often have sore legs as a result of the fertilizer, that was from no more than about two years in the company. BN*

According to these women, many of the women have sustained serious, ongoing health issues due to exposure to dangerous fertilizer:

*There are also other women who are sick. My own grandmother, my grandmother is one of the six women that I mentioned before. She is also one from that group. Because of the effects of the fertilizers, people said her eyes have cataracts on their eyelids. They cannot see because of the effects of fertilizer. At the moment she gropes around, this is despite my grandmother being a strong person, still young and also not incapacitated. Still normal, she just cannot see because of the effects of the fertilizer. BN*

As transport is extremely limited, a number of women are forced to leave their village so they can live closer to their workplace. In the new location, their lives are full of hardship:

*We now want to say this: this company arrived it was good; the diocese also said so, said that it was good. But when we think again, it feels like we want to cry ... we left our village because we lived at the company. Working for the company, there were normally fistfights with the irrigation people over water. We were forced to go up to that tall tower there to turn the water on. There were so many challenges at that company. Travelling to report your attendance was also tough. BR.*

BN worked as a manual labourer without health facilities, adequate living conditions, or sufficient provisions, and she was forced into debt to support herself. After three years, she resigned and was paid only a very small amount:

*So, from 2013 I started [working], and I resigned in 2016. The payment that was given after resigning was just Rp2,600,000. That was all I received.*

## **Destruction of the environment and local sources of livelihood**

Palm oil plantations in Boven Digoel have had a devastating impact on the natural environment, including deforestation, changes in the local climate, loss of biodiversity, and land and water pollution:

*[The company] cleared the forest, they took all the wood that could be processed in the factory. So, the wood which cannot be processed could not be taken, only the wood which is processed was taken. Afterwards, we saw how the weather became bad, it changed. As was already spoken about, so many fish have died. The factory occupied the river, on the banks of the Digoel River. A great many fish died, [there was] a long drought with bushfires. We had marshes with sago [trees], normally Papuan people eat sago, but now it has all been burnt away. It has impacted us because where we should find our food now. BA*

Companies have changed consumption norms of indigenous communities in Boven Digoel. Rampant deforestation has made it difficult to gather sago, bananas, and hunt game birds. All these were staple foods found in traditional forests. As a result, people have begun to consume rice and junk food which the companies distribute when they arrive:

*Now we no longer eat food from nature because we work for the company. Nature's food has begun to vanish – the pigs have disappeared, the sago has disappeared. BR*

*Before, I was barefoot [and] lived in the forest, eating fruit from the forest, eating rattan. I would go hunting with my uncle. Behind the house, there used to be pigs to catch. Now it is hard because of the sound of company vehicles. So, the animals are scared, they run into the forest. The ones near the house are no longer there. BN*

*My parents used to get food from nature, now the children eat a lot of junk food which is brought by the company ... the bananas in Boven used to be good, before the company came. Now the bananas are not good. There are only a few good ones. Now our children eat rice, if they eat sago they get a sore stomach. The elders used to live in the forest, but their bodies were strong [and their] minds good. Now [we] live in permanent houses, but our minds are empty. BA*

*Before, when [we] were still children, we would eat sago and drink our mother's milk; children would obey their parents. I have three children, I give them sago to eat, they listen [to me]. But my youngest child doesn't listen because they were given canned milk which made them stupid. Is it because of the influence of the junk food? The company brought it. Only nature knows what is inside our hearts. BG*

In addition, indigenous communities no longer enjoy the beauty of the natural environment. The forest birds started to disappear after company employees began hunting them. In the past, the traditional forests were a place where birds were in abundance:

*In 2014, my father went out. The birds were searching for the forest, they left in a flock, all grouped together. My father departed and he said this: "Today the land that I own is destroyed. Give me a car, I want to see the*



*destroyed land, the land and forest which have been destroyed". He was given a car, there was a driver who took him around the hamlets. The remaining birds only live in groups now. When the car drove down the road and they didn't fly away, they just moved aside. The car went past ... So, my father returned home. My father cried because he went and saw these birds looking for a place [to live] ... There were tree branches which had been chopped down. The birds went there at night, they lived among the wood. The birds only found shelter amongst this wood. There were times when they slept on the ground, not on top of the trees ... Eventually, the people made a camp, the company built it for the employees. The employees arrived, they wiped out the birds which were there. The other animals were left stranded ... That night, the employees went [to hunt the birds], some had pieces of wood, bows [and] rifles. Those employees murdered the animals until there were none left. I have gone and looked, all of them are gone, the animals are silent. There are no birds singing anymore. All that can be seen are palm oil trees. BA*

As articulated by BA, the destruction of the natural environment and changes in the local climate as a result of palm oil plantations has caused a malaria epidemic:

*Here in Subur, [people have] contracted a mix of malaria and brain problems ... Before, there was still forest, the disease would come to an end in the forest, but now the forest is gone ... Children have died from the effects of malaria. The common symptoms: their whole body was hot, they had diarrhoea, that is when my child passed away. The epidemic continued to attack us. As we entered 2012, the companies arrived here. Then we began to feel burdened, the changes were massive. The weather began to change and become different. For example, we couldn't recognise the hot season [and] the wet season too. We wanted to know which was the hot season, the wet season was all wrong. Then came the malaria. It has made our children stressed. We know it is mixed malaria because of the medical terms that are usually used.*

Palm oil plantations have made it hard for communities to identify the boundaries of their customary land and they struggle to recognise natural signs because the birds which indicate the different seasons have begun to disappear:

*Until today we could feel it, we could feel nature. Nature had natural signs. We would listen to the birds which meant it was the hot season. Now when it is the hot season, there are no natural signs, it has been destroyed by the arrival of the company. The water is already polluted. The air was clean but now it is polluted ... I no longer know [the boundaries] off by heart. There were boundaries before. There was a river, from this river to that river was owned by this person. This was a marsh with sago trees, this was a boundary, this was a different clan. So, we knew the different boundaries from the marshes, the rivers [and] the trees, we knew [boundaries] from those things. We can no longer recognise it, because it is all palm oil ... Go there and look, it's just palm oil trees. So now I can't recognise the boundaries there. I don't know anymore. BG*

*I cannot recognise [the boundaries]. All the little streams are gone, they have been closed off, what do we know now? All of the land has been closed off, all trees are the same now [palm oil trees], how do we know? The palm oil which has now been planted is already tall, nearly two metres. BA*

Waste from the plantation dumped into surrounding rivers has also meant communities can no longer rely on fishing to supplement their incomes:

*We eat from the Kio River. Our parents raised us by catching fish and shrimp from the river ... Now the Kio River is wrecked, there are no longer fish that eat the worms we use as bait, even though we only used to use worms. Now we have to use prawns. If [you use] worms, then it will go rotten because there are no fish that will eat it. BN*

*I like to fish in the Digul river. I fished with ripe bananas, I got carp and turtles. Now the company has come, the Digul River is bad. We go fishing, [but] it is difficult to catch anything. BM*

*Before, the river was beautiful. The river is no longer beautiful, the water flowing through is cloudy. It used to be clear, we could see fish in it. Shrimp [and] fish would swim past. But go and look at a river named the Mil River, it used to be clear, we could see shrimp in there, but now it's so pitiful. Go look at the cloudy water ... in much of the Bian River, there are fish which swim on the surface, they are Koloso fish, that is what I have observed. If we go fishing, those are what we catch, those fish are visible. The company is there now, it is devastating. Fish, crocodiles, all are gone ... Our yields*

*have been extremely reduced. Before, there were a lot of fish to catch. Now if you go out for a day, only one or two fish can be caught. In the past, we could catch fish until our basket (noken) was so full that we could hardly lift it. Friends would usually have to come with rope to help bring [the basket] home. The amount [of fish] which we could catch before was huge. But now we can no longer catch that large amount. Before you could normally catch 20-50 fish, but that is no more. BA*

## Community response to the expansion of extractive industries

The arrival of companies in Boven Digoel has been met with mixed responses. Some residents accepted the companies with reservations. Others remained opposed to large-scale extractive industries. In 2019, residents of Aiwat released a statement rejecting the entry of PT MRJ on their customary land.<sup>22</sup> This was restated during a meeting between residents and the company. A meeting organised by PT. MRJ ended without a deal, despite the company's promises of cash payments and improved facilities.<sup>23</sup> Amandus Goam, a Wambon Tekamerop leader from Aiwat, responded to PT. MRJ's plans by stating:

*We, the traditional people of Wambon Tekamerop, firmly reject MRJ. Investment is forbidden on our traditional land.*<sup>24</sup>

This rejection of plantation expansion was voiced by women in this research. They refused the company's plans to expand operations because they are aware of the damage suffered by the loss of their traditional forest:

*The companies often target us landowners to take more land. But us owners do not want to [relinquish more land] ... Now the community does not agree. The companies have recently come to ask [for more land], but the*

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<sup>22</sup> Pusaka, November 2019, "Perusahaan PT. MRJ Milik Marimutu Sinivasan Ditolak Masyarakat Adat Wambon Tekamerop di Boven Digoel," <pusaka.or.id/2019/11/perusahaan-pt-mrj-milik-marimutu-sinivasan-ditolak-masyarakat-adat-wambon-tekamerop-di-boven-digoel/>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



The painted signs and large crosses are part of the palang sasi strategy to stop the encroachment of extractive industries onto customary land. Photos by AJAR/PWG team, late 2019.



*community here refused. Eventually, the companies were driven out and ordered to leave. The community here does not want to allow any more companies, it has only caused us loss, our forests have already vanished. They [the company] were furious. After being refused, they held a meeting and then left. That happened recently ... So, any company that wants to come and ask, they will be refused, [we] don't want it. The community here is smart now, before we didn't understand. We thought that with the company our lives in the future would be good, but that never happened. It was only more destruction. BC*

*No company has come onto the land of the Yame clan. I don't want a company to come onto our land. We have men and women descendants. The men cannot make up their own minds so if a company wants to come they have to sit down with us and listen to us women. BO*

To protect their customary land from large companies, communities in Boven Digoel developed a number of strategies. Since 2015, they have worked alongside church leaders like Father Niko. One strategy used is annual commemorative events in locations that have specific importance to the local community, like the site of the first baptism. For groups such as the Mandobo and Wambon Tekamerop, these events strengthen their cultural identity, re-claim their history and demonstrate to companies their entitlement to the land.

Another important strategy in Boven Digoel is 'Pemalangan' or 'Palang Sasi'. The following explanation of *Palang Sasi* was provided by Beatrix Gebze who works for eL-AdPPer and helped facilitate AJAR's research:

*After the communities became organised, they began working with church leaders, in this case Father Niko. They took constructed crosses which is a form of Sasi. Normally, when Sasi takes the form of a crucifixion it means that people are forbidden to seize that place, forest or its contents. This is because it would be a violation of the customary rights of that community.*

As Beatrix further explained, women play an important role in the implementation of *Palang Sasi*:

*When the men go out to plant the sacred crosses, the women help by singing even if they are only going to the boundaries of the village, outside the*

*village, to the company, or when a guest comes to visit ... the women almost always explain to people the function of these gardens of crosses. They explain the function of the crosses, what they are used for and explain that it is a form of our struggle.*

In Boven Digoel, *Palang Sasi* has proved to be a successful tool for conservation for indigenous communities. Because of their strong faith and the importance placed on the crucifixion, *Palang Sasi* has allowed communities to unite against land grabbing and environmental degradation. This was explained by both Beatrix and BU from Anggai:

*An outcome of these sacred crosses being planted has been increased awareness, particularly amongst the community. They are conscious of their connection to the church and to the sacred places where crosses have been planted. There are individual fears when we destroy nature. "God will become angry", this is what the community has always said. Also, if a company wants to take over that place, they have to understand the local culture. When we have planted the Sasi like the cross, it means that the company will violate the community's customary rights [if they insist taking the land], then the company will have to accept sanctions ... the planting of crucifixions is considered to be sacred for Papuan communities. For the Mandobo indigenous group, the cross is a very sacred symbol. Moreover, their connection to the church is still very strong because they place all of their hope in God. If they transgress, God will become angry and will take everything from them. Because their strength comes from the cross, they help in the struggle against companies. Beatrix Gebze.*

*It's far-reaching, we have made barriers with big crosses, so we are scared. If we have set up crosses like that, then we are forbidden. If you have the courage to disturb the place, it means you will become a victim, you will die without knowing why. Because it's already a garden of crosses, we have made a promise to our ancestors. We have ancestors and they listen. BU*

In Anggai, the use of *Palang Sasi* has created some tension between members of the community. Since land clearing began in 2013, there has been significant conflict between the eight main clans in Anggai and PT. MJR. One point of tension was the establishment of a port, constructed

without approval from the community. In response, community leaders campaigned demanding compensation and *Palang Sasi* was used. As BN explained, this strategy meant that local workers were not allowed to enter the palm oil plantation:

*They went through the intersection where there were crosses. Those of us who worked there were forbidden by the eight clans, forbidden to work ... when there are crosses it means that work is forbidden.*

BN and other women wanted to keep working in the nursery section. This was because there was a long drought and the women worried that the seedlings would die if left unattended. Because they were worried, they snuck into the company complex which infuriated clan leaders:

*Eventually we snuck in from behind and entered the company's area. We took care of the seedlings first and watered from morning until we left at 6pm. From the back of the forest we entered the village. After that, somebody from the eight clans found out. They were furious with us women: "if anybody goes to check on the palm oil again, you will be beaten. Let the oil palm die, let the company feel it. They have to pay for the port first".*  
BN





Papuan women walk past a palm oil plantation in Papua.  
Photo by Albertus Vembrianto.



**Fakfak: Resilience in  
The Face of Environmental  
Destruction – Indigenous  
Women as Plantation  
Workers in Tomage**



FD is an indigenous Sumuri woman born in Tanah Merah in 1986: “I moved to Tomage in 2007 after I married. Life in Tomage is good, I have a good relationship with my in-laws”.

Her upbringing in Tanah Merah was not easy: “I am from a family of 18. Our life was hard. My father would harvest sago or go fishing. He wouldn’t return until all the children were asleep. My mother would wake up to cook, we would only eat sago”.

She chose fishing line as her symbol: “fishing makes me happy. I catch shrimp and fish which I cook for my children”. FD grows bananas and betel nut, raises chickens and cattle, harvests sago, sells cakes and tends a flower garden.

Like many women in Tomage, she works on the palm oil plantation as a day-labourer to support her children: “I’m an employee of the palm oil company, the wages vary from day to day”.

Before the introduction of palm oil, she sold animal hide and harvested produce: “women would sell crocodile hides, one inch for Rp35,000. It would be sold to Javanese people ... we would also go to Kokas to sell sago. Nowadays, we only harvest sago to eat”.

In early 2020, AJAR worked alongside ELSHAM Papua to conduct PAR in Tomage in the regency of Fakfak. Fakfak covers an area of 14,320 km<sup>2</sup> and is located in the southwest of the province of West Papua.<sup>1</sup> Tomage is home to both the Mbaham Matta and Irarutu clans, but this research focused on the Irarutu clan. A total of 18 women from the Tomage and Selawir participated in the research which used techniques including, river of life, timelines, community mapping, and resource mapping.

## A history of military conflict in Fakfak

Over the past century, the Fakfak has witnessed significant military conflicts. During World War II, there was intense fighting between Japanese and Allied

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<sup>1</sup> Pemerintah Kabupaten Fakfak, 2021, “Sejarah Singkat,” <[fakfakkab.go.id/?page\\_id=277](http://fakfakkab.go.id/?page_id=277)>.

forces. Many artefacts from the Pacific War have been discovered in and around Kokas, like remnants of cannons, caves used by the Japanese occupiers, forts, and lookout posts.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1960s, Fakfak was again the site of intense military conflict, this time between Dutch special forces and soldiers representing the newly independent Republic of Indonesia. In an attempt to push the Dutch out of Papua, President Sukarno launched a campaign of guerrilla warfare, including dropping paratroopers into Fakfak, which the Dutch refused to relinquish.<sup>3</sup>

Since being integrated into the Republic of Indonesia, Fakfak has experienced violence from Indonesian security forces. In 2008, Indonesian police arrested 41 people after three people from Sungai raised the Morning Star flag outside the building where the 1969 ‘Act of Free Choice’ was ratified.<sup>4</sup> In 2016, demonstrations marking the anniversary of integration into Indonesia took place across Papua in which close to 2,000 people were arrested.<sup>5</sup> Following rallies in Fakfak, mass arrests were carried out including the detention of at least 19 children.<sup>6</sup> In August 2019, thousands of people in Fakfak took part in nationwide protests over the undemocratic treatment of Papuans across Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> In December 2019, Indonesian security forces responded to these events with mass arrests. 54 men were arrested in Fakfak when images emerged of detainees with hands tied together and forced to crawl in front of Indonesian security personnel.<sup>8</sup> An account from a women witness follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Wiesman, “The Forgotten War in S.W. Pacific: Air Raids from Australia Against the Dutch East Indies,” *War History Online*, 24 April 2017.

<sup>3</sup> “Dutch Troops Fight Indonesian Chutists,” *The New York Times*, 21 May 1962.

<sup>4</sup> The Jakarta Post, 22 July 2008, “Indonesian Police Probe ‘Free Papua’ Over Insurgency Links,” <[www.etan.org/et2008/7july/19/20inwest.htm](http://www.etan.org/et2008/7july/19/20inwest.htm)>.

<sup>5</sup> Al Jazeera, 3 May 2016, “Mass Arrests Reported in Indonesia’s Restive Papua,” <[www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/5/3/mass-arrests-reported-in-indonesias-restive-papua](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/5/3/mass-arrests-reported-in-indonesias-restive-papua)>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Sophie Chao, 17 June 2020, “West Papua and Black Lives Matter,” *Inside Indonesia*, <[www.insideindonesia.org/west-papua-and-black-lives-matter](http://www.insideindonesia.org/west-papua-and-black-lives-matter)>.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, 5 December 2019, “Indonesia Arrests Yet More Indigenous Papuans: 20 Charged with Treason for Raising Papuan ‘Morning Star’ Flag”, <[www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/05/indonesia-arrests-yet-more-indigenous-papuans](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/05/indonesia-arrests-yet-more-indigenous-papuans)>.

*1 December 2019 saw the shooting of civilians who were heading to the city. Then, the Mobile Brigade Corps soldiers and police came from the city to the village. It seems the military already knew the people wanted to make for the city. It is a day of remembrance for all Papuan people. They entered Kayuni District and the people were armed with sharp weapons. The police knew and eventually the attack happened. Two civilians were shot, one then passed away, one was shot in the right thigh. Around 53 people from the community were taken by the police for 2 days. The remaining 23 were processed, they are still detained, still awaiting trial. They are being charged with treason because some people had the Morning Star flag. Because of that incident, many fled into the forest because people's houses were being ambushed. The people who are detained are also from villages around Kayuni including Warpa, Kuagas, Pikipik, Kwamkwamur, Kriawasawas and Bahbadan. I was there when it happened. I am an eyewitness. The bodies of the dead were discovered a week after this happened. When it happened, the village was empty. On 4 December, me and FS went into the forest to find the residents. Later, on 6 December at 11pm, there was information that the bodies had been found. That report was from the Secretary of Kayuni Village. FR*

Under the New Order, Tomage and surrounding villages became centers of the Transmigration Program. In 1980, Tomage was established after it grew out from the Ottoweri village and Rovinus Nanafesi, the first village head, was asked to accept one of two land use permits. He chose transmigration over palm oil, because he was concerned that pollution from plantations would impact future generations.

Transmigrants first arrived in Bomberai district in 1984 and were settled in 'Settlement Zones' known as SP. In Tomage, transmigration was carried out in intervals beginning in the early 1990s. The first group of transmigrants arrived in 1993 and consisted of 500 families. These transmigrants, from Java and other parts of Papua, were settled in SP1. The second group arrived in 1995 and were settled in SP2 and SP3, and the third group arrived in 1997 and were settled in SPs 4 to 7. The last group arrived in SP8 in 2012. This group consisted of 200 families from other parts of Papua. SP8 is bordered by the land of the Mbaham Matta and Irarutu clans. Each



transmigrant was given a house, half a hectare of kitchen garden, two pieces of land of 0,5 ha each for commercial use, and farming equipment. They were also given a land certificate.

From discussions with male residents, a number of issues have arisen in Tomage as a result of transmigration. Traditional owners were firstly not compensated for the land settled by transmigrants. A number of transmigrants also sold their land in Tomage and moved back to Java. Upon realising their lives in Java were not prosperous, they returned to Tomage and bought more land in the area. Local communities resent this practice of buying and selling land which was taken from them for transmigration without compensation. They refer to the practice as ‘wearing your shoes in Tomage and taking them off in the city’.

Despite this, locals often have good relations with transmigrants, and learn to farm different vegetables and cook Javanese food:

*The transmigrants began to come here, and they grew water spinach, we watched them and also started to grow it. We grow it and also eat it ... we learnt about these vegetables from the Javanese. They come from the Trans [transmigrants’ villages] and we would also go down there to buy things. We slept alongside each other and they would tell us how to grow these vegetables. They were going down there so I let them sleep at my house. I said to them, “How do you get these vegetables?” “Mama, there is a way. You first use a hoe and after that you plant. You then have to keep watering them.” “Oh, I see.” We eat vegetables from the forest which isn’t right, this food is the good stuff. After that, I also started growing it. I also learnt how to make tapai from the Javanese. They came here and took home with them some yeast to cook. I watched and thought “Oh I could also make that”. I have since made it myself. But my children don’t like that cooking and I’ve been too lazy to make it again. If my children like the food, then I make it if I already know how to ... So, our experiences do not just come from ourselves, they come from the Javanese who teach us Papuans. I now know how to make these things. We follow them and then we learn how it is done. FB*

## Extractive industries in Fakfak Regency and Tomage District

Extractive industries are by no means a new phenomenon in Fakfak. With concessions ranging from hundreds to thousands of hectares, Fakfak has kakao, coconut, coffee, and clove plantations.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, there has been an intensification of nutmeg plantations covering an area of 17,542 ha.<sup>10</sup> Nutmeg cultivation has been widely adopted the Mbaham Matta clan.

The Irarutu clan has chosen not to engage in nutmeg cultivation which has not taken hold in Bomberai and Tomage districts.<sup>11</sup> These two districts are known for mining, livestock farming, and oil palm plantations, all of which began with the introduction of transmigration. The first mining company to begin operations was a British oil company which was established in 2000. Eight years later an Indonesian oil company arrived and began operations. A number of local men work as labourers for these companies.<sup>12</sup> The Agriculture and Livestock Agency also established cattle farms in the region. The community's customary land is included in concession areas of the British oil company, meaning they are squeezed between the oil and gas business and palm oil plantations.

### The growth of palm oil and horizontal conflict in Tomage

The 'Agropolitan Program' developed in 2014 through a partnership between the Fakfak regional government and the Ministry of Agriculture, granted PT. RSP permission to develop large-scale palm oil plantations in the Tomage and Bomberay districts. As part of the agreement, PT. RSP was allowed to establish plantations covering an area of 30,595.89 ha.<sup>13</sup> The Mbaham

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<sup>9</sup> Pemerintah Kabupaten Fakfak, 2018, "Perkebunan," <fakfakkab.go.id/?page\_id=328>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> JATAM, "Behind the BP Tangguh Project Propaganda," *JATAM Mining Advocacy Network*, October 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Awas Miffee, 29 January 2014, "Rencana mirip MIFEE di FakFak," <awasmiffee.potager.org/?p=745&lang=id>.

Matta and Iraratu clans argued that PT. RSP encroached on their customary lands without their permission.

Before this program, palm oil companies had already begun approaching leaders from Tomage. In 2011, a number of representatives from PT. RSP came to Tomage with police to persuade the village head, Rovinus, to grant permission to the oil palm companies. They persuaded a number of leaders from other villages to travel to Manokwari to look at palm oil plantations there. The company then began a process of socialisation to introduce residents to palm oil. They promised the community clean water, new roads, and education scholarships:

*There were men and women who the palm oil (companies) wanted permission from to enter. They said, “Okay Boss, if you want to come here, it is important that you give us what we have asked for. Clean water, roads, schools for our children and money for school fees.” They took note but unbeknownst to us, they would not address our concerns. The company replied, “Once we have already entered and begun operations, then I will start building a road until it reaches the village, I will provide clean water”. The community in Tomage heard that and were happy, so we said, “Oh yes, we used to drink water from the river and walk on foot to Bomberai. Now the company has entered, and they will build a good road for us, there will be drinking water, so we won’t face any more difficulties.” After that, the company entered. As it turned out, the community is once again facing hardships. FD*

The following year, representatives from the company returned and met residents from Selawir. They distributed payments of good faith of over Rp10 million to two villages (Ottoweri and Tomage) which were then given to the leaders of the Nanafesi clan. These leaders distributed the money to the heads of each family, especially members of the three clans whose land would be used for oil plantations – the Kasina, Nanafesi, and Lober.

Once the agropolitan program was underway, PT. RSP began clearing forest to plant palm oil seedlings. This was done before the land had been formally released from the traditional owners. In 2015, the company then promised to pay Rp120 million to the traditional landowners to lease the land for 30 years:

*They asked to rent [the land], so we gave it. If the company leaves, yeah, the land will remain with us. The company just came ... the land wasn't purchased, thousands of hectares without any purchase payment at all. That made my husband angry, "if you do that, you should have told me so that I could know about this and have spoken about it but that is not the case. You yourself sent these people out there without my permission ... It should not be like that. We should sit together and talk, that's the rule. FB*

Many members of the Irarutu clan worry that their traditional forests will be destroyed. In 2017, the Irarutu began to organise themselves. They requested that the government end land clearing on their traditional land and that the licenses of palm oil companies be revoked.

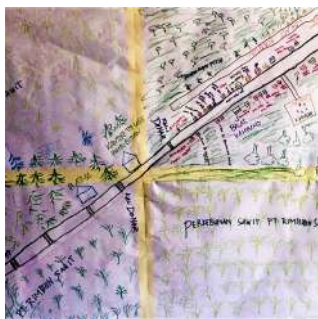
Since PT. RSP began operations, there has been significant conflicts between the Irarutu and Mbaham Matta over customary land boundaries.<sup>14</sup> Both groups claim land which PT. RSP is currently using. To date there is no resolution, given the ambiguous mapping of customary territory by different communities. The lack of a commonly recognised map which provides clear geographical boundaries makes it difficult for communities to identify which areas belong to them:

*Yeah, it's all palm oil, all of the green parts like this ... where can you see the place? The place where we normally cross to catch animals and fish, where is it now? It is unrecognizable. The marking place, from here to there is no longer recognizable, all is palm oil now. The situation is still like this but we're already confused, how about when the palm oil trees are getting taller? It will be worse to us. The river goes from there to here, but we're confused about that ... If Antero is still next to that area then we will be able to find food across from the river. But if from Settlement Zone 1 until here, I no longer know [the border of the indigenous lands]. Where the river starts and where it goes, I know don't know. FB*

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<sup>14</sup> Kadate Bintuni "Pemprov Diminta Percepat Tapal Batas Bintuni dan Fakfak", *PT. Kadate Bintuni Media Utama*, 15 May 2018.





Photos by AJAR/PWG team, early 2020.

## Creating plantation workers from a place of social hardship

Before the arrival of extractive industries, Tomage was a remote district in Fakfak. Development had not reached the region, it was hard to access due to poor transportation and social services were very limited. This meant local communities struggled to meet their daily needs. The community began to see positive impacts of development when companies began to operate in the region:

*Our life used to be hard. We would go to spread our net in turn. If we went out to sea, I would be scared. My father would go out fishing to catch shrimp. If there were no shrimp, he would climb up the eucalyptus trees to look for Yakob birds, the white cockatoos, which would be sold to pay for school fees ... We made an income doing this until 2006. Before finding work in the palm oil plantation, we worked harvesting sago to eat. My father used to work catching Yakob birds which could be sold for Rp500,000. Now one bird is worth 1 million rupiah'. FB*

*In the past, the men would harvest sago, that was our staple food. If you wanted to buy rice, you'd have to first paddle to Kokas to sell sago, then you could buy rice. At that time, we'd work ourselves half to death finding an income or education. Most school children had nothing to do. If people wanted to buy kerosene, they'd have to paddle first. If the water flowed down, they'd go. If the water flowed up, we wouldn't go. Now that there's the company, it's a bit better. People can find an income more easily. If there wasn't any, you'd have to go tap for resin. If we wanted to build a church, but we had to harvest sago first. We donated Rp10,000 to buy wood for the church. Now I work at the palm oil company as an employee. FJ*

*Life in the village used to be hard, there was no road, there wasn't a kiosk in the village. We would walk on foot from Tomage to Bomberai. We would leave at 6am and arrive at 1pm to get sugar, salt, MSG, soap, and kerosene. We would walk home on foot and arrive at night-time. By 2013, there were already motorbikes. An oil company came and opened the road in 2012. After that, the road was connected by the government. In 2018 the road was asphalted, once that was finished there were motorbikes and cars. Before*

*it was hard for children to go to school, now they can go to universities. Before you would have to give birth in the village, now we have met a midwife and there is a hospital. FA*

*Since the arrival of palm oil, we have been able to cook with oil and MSG. If this wasn't the case, I'd be sorry. Yeah, we eat sago, go fishing and hunting for food. Although we say the palm oil is no good, at least we can eat ... after a few years we got a nice road with asphalt - there are also more vehicles going back and forth. Life was definitely difficult, not like it is now. There was no transport. We would eat fish stew, we also had salt, that's all we would eat. Stew was the only thing we ate. We had never been introduced to frying oil. If you want to eat something fried, you can cook coconut - grated coconut, squeeze it, then cook it and have it with cooked vegetables. FB*

When PT. RSP began to operate large-scale plantations, people, including women, became day laborers for the company. Difficulties faced by communities in Tomage meant decided to work on plantations, even though issues around land acquisition have yet to be resolved:

*At the moment there is palm oil, so I am happy. I now work in the plantation as a day laborer. The wage is not enough to live on, so I also grow food in the garden. I grow bananas which are for me to eat. I buy sugar, coffee, I have a tab at the kiosk which I pay out of my wage (Rp500,000). FF*

*I started working in the palm oil plantation to get income. I'm just an ordinary employee. The wage is Rp2 million per month, but it goes up and down. It's normally Rp2 million or Rp1.5 million depending if you can get out into the field. FG*

*I feel happy because there is money to help send my children to school ... I can get other necessities and also send money to my children who are at school. FE*

The hardships faced by residents of Tomage was useful to the company which needed a large workforce to manage the plantations once land had been cleared. The company recruited many people, including the elderly:

*In 2014, the palm oil company arrived. We were still living in rundown houses, houses on stilts. People from the company came to the village to*

*persuade residents. They brought a pillow with them to persuade us to sleep, to win our hearts. Since taking employment there, life has been miserable. We have to provide food for ourselves ... Yeah, if we followed the Department of Labor's rules then anyone over 50 years old would be forbidden. But the company remembers us, so we're still allowed. If the company followed the Department of Labor rules we wouldn't be allowed. FB*

Recruiting the elderly meant the company did not provide official contracts. The elderly would remain day laborers without the chance to become permanent employees:

*If that (contract) is introduced, it means that I can no longer work once I reach that age. They said that is the reason for us, for the community or employees. They said, "Yeah, you men and the women, now if you ask for a SPK, if we provide that it means that if you are that age that you can no longer work. FD*

Palm oil companies also recruited children as day laborers to work alongside their parents. Because these companies provide income and alternative livelihoods, many parents permit their children to work when they are still of school age. Most children who become day laborers leave school because their parents have passed away and they can no longer afford to pay school fees. In other cases, young girls leave school after falling pregnant:

*At that time, that young child had just finished junior high school and wanted to start vocational school, but she couldn't do that because her father passed away. So, she followed her mother working in the palm oil plantation. She should not be able to work [because of the age limitation], but the company allowed her. She also has a younger sibling who is still in school age, but the sibling also had to leave when in the first grade of junior high school because their father passed away. They went back to the village and started working in the palm oil plantation ... The children work with their mothers in the plantation so that they can pay for school fees for their sibling to go to junior high school, they are still in the first grade. Until today, all of them are still out in the plantation. FK*

*I wanted to start vocational school, but my father passed away. I went out to support my mother by working in the plantation ... I've worked in the*



*plantation since the age of 18. When working in the plantation, they don't ask your age. Many children under 18 work in the plantation, we work together. FO*

*I started junior school in Settlement Zone 1. When I was in the first grade, I had to leave school because I fell pregnant, my child did not survive ... When I worked there, my mother looked after me. I used to work in the plantation, but I left because of issues with my stomach. FP*

Many children leave school to work and help provide a living for their families. Palm oil is a means of survival, as it provides employment and an income even though they are unable to finish basic education:

*My sister works in the plantation clearing grass, so my mother doesn't have to work. My older sister lives in the village. The wage system is also the same ... I started working for the company in 2013 [aged 15], pruning and then planting. All people in my village work in the plantation. Currently, there are many children who work in the palm oil plantation. FM*

*After leaving school, I started work in the plantation. I normally work clearing grass, clearing a circle around the tree roughly five metres from the base. My first time working there I was filling polybags with soil ... I like working in the plantation because it means that I can obtain an income. FN*

*My child helps me, so I feel relieved. If I'm sick, then she can help me work. Once I have recovered, then I go back to work. FK*

Access to education is a central issue in the district. It is a key reason village leaders gave permission for palm oil companies to operate in their areas, as they hoped the companies would provide education for the younger generation:

*On 1 August 2012, there was a discussion between indigenous communities and companies in Selawir. We said if you cut down one tree, you must raise one human. You should not raise older people like us, but the new generation, for the children to study. But that has not happened. There was an agreement at that time, so we signed the attendance list which meant Selawir was in approval". Male leader of Selawir.*

[My husband], *he was pestered by a Javanese person from the palm oil company until he finally agreed. He said, "Sir, I can do this and that ... we can help the community, help send the children to school ... If you don't agree, how will the children go to school? Where will you get the money to send the children to school?"*. FB

Indonesia's labor law permits people under the age of 18 to work subject to a number of conditions.<sup>15</sup> These conditions must be observed in Tomage to ensure that work being carried out by children does not impair their physical, mental, or social development. This includes their right to a basic education.

## PT. RSP's work regime: precarious day laborers

In general, community members provide manual labor and maintenance on the plantation. Although men and women work together, there are certain jobs which only men do:

*I start off in the polybag section. I move the small polybags to the larger section where they can be planted. The company usually do the planting by using an excavator to dig [the land], there are also people who make new trenches using hoes. Each trench is paid Rp3,000 and is for one tree. They plant them, but it is the men from the village who do the planting, not the women. We [the women] just maintain the area for the trees, clear away the grass, and move the small polybags to the area where the big ones go, that is our job. Until last month, which was February, we started moving to the other block because there were no polybags there, there was no planting, the field was empty. We moved to the block to clear around the base of the trees. They have fronds so we clear a circle around the base.* FD

The company does not provide safety equipment and workers are expected to purchase this themselves. This is not only a financial burden, but also makes them vulnerable to workplace accidents:

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<sup>15</sup> N. Widya Utami, 10 January 2020, "UU No 13 Tahun 2003 Tentang Ketenagakerjaan dan Penjasarannya," *Insight Talenta*.

*We should have received safety equipment. Right now, we do not receive any safety equipment from the company. Shoes, socks, masks, gloves, we have to get all of these with our own wage. At the end of the month, we have to pay our debts. How are we meant to provide for our household? In terms of health, the palm oil company is meant to be responsible for that. We go ask for a truck for our transportation, and they can provide that. Yeah, only transport, the company provides diesel. They won't give us money, but we have to take it from our own money from working in the plantation and seek treatment ... We have suggested gloves because we need safety equipment at work. Hats, gloves, socks, shoes or a sickle, but they have not provided those until today. There has been no answer from the palm oil company. FD*

*There is no equipment whatsoever, there are no masks. We must wait to get paid and buy it ourselves. FB*

*My father died because he got sick working in the palm oil plantation. My father worked as an unskilled labourer, clearing grass and maintaining the palm oil ... My father worked hard in the plantation until he fell ill. FK*

Despite working as day laborers, women are paid monthly. When calculated, their monthly wages would only be on par with the minimum wage for West Papua if they worked full time. Most women in Tomage work an average of three to four days a week from 8am to 12pm:

*Before there was a full week of work but now people only have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, just four days. Friday, Saturday and Sunday we have off. It was only when the palm oil first came that there was a full week of work. We learn when there's no work from the driver that picks us up. Normally if there's no diesel then the driver won't come to pick us up, if it's a holiday then there's also no work. FA*

*Between 2013 and 2015, there were six days work per week, but between 2017 and 2018 the number of days reduced. Now it is three, four, or five days. It will go up to six days then back down to four. FD*

*In 2019 we worked four days, before that we worked five days per week. I only make around Rp1 million ... Now there are only three workdays. So, we don't make the same money as we used to. FE*

Payments are often late and involve a confusing process that is open to corruption and exploitation:

*In one month, there are normally 16 or 22 days of work depending on the hours we get. The payday is also not regular, it was normally on the 8th of every month, but it's been the 17th since November 2019. We have held demonstrations to protest about payments. But the people say that it's late coming from Jakarta. The company asked for identity cards, then told us that the payment will be done through the State Bank of Indonesia. But at the moment us women are still paid via those other people. The account book was created by the supervisor. The people haven't gathered together the identity cards so there isn't a bank account yet. FD*

*All the SP people here work for the company ... we had a pay slip, but that was before. Now there's the BNI account book. They [the company] come and give out the money every month, the wages. They show us the book and the ATM card, then they take the account book with them. The person cuts each wage by Rp6,000 to ensure the balance. For example, if we need to top up the money for saving, we just give the money to the person. So, we don't know if the person is dodgy or not. When the payday comes, they will look for the employees in the blocks, give the account books, so we get confused. FA*

*The company said that we have to use a bank account opened by the company, it is forbidden to use our private bank account. At the same time, the BNI ATM is in the city so it is hard to get the money. Male leader of Tomage*

The company provides religious holiday allowances for all day laborers. However, the amount given to each worker changes according to which religion they follow:

*I work for the company, I started in 2015. I get the same wage as my friends. I start in the morning and work until 12pm. When the Eid feast comes, the company gives Rp1 million for holiday allowance. That is just for Muslim workers, Christians only get Rp500,000. During Christmas, there is no extra payment. It is only given for some holidays because the palm oil boss is Muslim. FA*



## The environmental impact of palm oil plantations

Palm oil plantations have had a number of negative impacts on the environment in Tomage. One impact has been unmanaged industrial runoff which has entered the surrounding river system:

*Certainly, there is a good road now, but the challenges caused by palm oil make us disappointed ... It's good, good for sure, but it has a lot of effects. We certainly spoke about this before, [that] the palm oil has a lot of runoff. But the people said, "There is none. The runoff will go into the trench. There are trenches for the runoff". However, it turns out that the big trench which they made flows to the river where we live. They said, "No, just plant there, we won't make anything else." Over time however, when we walk to the top, we can see that now the soil has been ruined ... all with holes. Then, when the rain comes, it flows into the river. [The plantation] is at the top of the mountain, so gradually it goes into the Donar River ... from here it flows into the Wamar River. All rivers are affected eventually. FB*

Due to contamination, local communities struggle to find clean water. As a result, women are forced to work harder to provide clean water for their family. The local community has stopped eating fish from the river because of potential health implications:

*So, we thought [the palm oil plantation] was good, but the effects are significant. Last night in fact, water was difficult [to get]. People wanted to get drinking water, they worked themselves half to death to bring back pails of drinking water. There were some who stood until night, [some] until the morning, then they got a little bit and went home. We have not experienced the effect, but our children and grandchildren are at risk. We want to say that it is not good, but they [the company] are already here ... What will happen in the future? We work ourselves half to death looking for fish too ... The eel tail catfish which have scales on each side and one backbone, now they are rarely caught. Before, I would just go throw the hook in and pull it out. Now, there are some which have sores, some that are boney. Now the fish meat is no longer tasty, it is all mushy like that. FB*

*We can no longer drink from the river because it's yellow. If there's rain, we collect the water to drink. If there's no rain we have to take buckets*

*down to the river. Now the river water has to be boiled first, pollution may have entered. FE*

*The existence of palm oil here makes us feel happy, but on the other hand we are troubled because we can no longer drink the water as we did before. We can no longer eat the fish we once used to. If you do eat them, in a few years you will get diseases throughout your body. FD*

As well as rivers, terrestrial ecosystems in Tomage have been impacted by palm oil plantations. Local communities can no longer depend on the forest as a source of livelihood, because much of their traditional land has been converted into palm oil plantations:

*We have many species of animals that have already run far away from the forests around the village ... we used to have forests close by, but now the bulldozers have cleared all of it, the forests are no more. We also had sago growing in the paddies, but that is gone. We want to harvest sago but there is none close by. We are forced to travel very far away before we can harvest sago to eat. We used to have wood that could be used to build houses, such as ironwood. It has already been cleared. So, to build a house, wood has to be purchased from somewhere else whereas before people had wood close by, in the forests close by. Just take the chainsaw, lift it up and go to the edge of the property. But now it is difficult, searching for wood in the forest there, [working yourself] half to death. FD*

*This palm oil ... we certainly say that it is good, but behind it ... we have now begun to feel the hardships of these fish and animals. The more time that passes, the further they are away; the birds are far away. You are lucky when they go the field, if they've gone to the forest they're even further away. We want to go hunting, but we work ourselves half to death to catch an animal. It has affected us because now we have to run or use snares to catch them ... The place where the men can hunt is far away. You used to be able to hear bird songs, but now you have to go 35 kms to hear the birds. FB*

The destruction of both water and land ecosystems in Tomage is detrimental to indigenous communities, especially women. Wages that they receive as laborers the plantations is not enough to sustain their daily lives. As a result,

they are dependent on the environment as a source of food. This translates as unpaid work which women in Tomage have carried done for generations:

*I normally go fishing. I catch gastor, tilapia, and catfish. When I go fishing, I catch five or six. I don't sell them because they are for me to eat. I only use string and nylon. FQ*

*To meet our daily needs we farm, harvest sago, hunt in the forest, and catch fish, all of which is for eating. FE*

*I was at school until grade 4, after that I helped my mum harvest sago to take back to the village and caught fish to smoke. It wasn't to sell, just for us to eat. FC*

After weighing the positives and negatives of palm oil plantations, many women now recognize the importance of preserving the natural environment for future generations. They worry that the ongoing destruction of the environment will not only endanger their lives, but the lives of their children and grandchildren:

*When I'm no longer around, our grandchildren will cry out and say, "It is our grandmothers and grandfathers that allowed the company to come in and make us live like this. If they stopped the palm oil from coming, we would be happy like the other villages". In the future, the palm oil will have to end ... our hearts are covered in wounds ... what will the future be like for our children after we have passed away? FB*

*We think about the future. We have children who want to go to school, so we cannot rely on palm oil. Certainly, our work now is good, but in the future there will be other effects afterwards ... We said that when the palm oil arrived, we were happy. But behind that, we thought, we have grandchildren, where do they want to live? ... I hope to work in the plantation and also to have a garden. This is because I think about the future, I have children that need to go to school. Like this palm oil, many years later, when we no longer work, we can harvest products from our own garden, go and sell those. It can be used to support our children's study. So, we cannot rely on palm oil because palm oil is already difficult. It is hard because it has impacts. It impacts our water, our fish. FD*





Kebar Valley. Photos by AJAR/PWG team, early 2020.



**Tambrau Regency:  
Mpur Women as Protectors  
of The Forest in Kebar Valley**

RI is a member of the Ariks clan from Wausin in Kebar Valley. She works both at the Asiti primary school as a casual teacher and at the market selling local food and goods from outside of Kebar.

RI's husband used to work in the Department of Fishery but has since become the district head which has led to conflict within the family. RI cares for her six children, one of which was adopted and two are living with serious disabilities. Since he was appointed the district head, Mama RI is often angry with him for his lack of transparency in relation to income, and for shirking family responsibilities.

*Sago is my soul; it grows on my land. Sago is most abundant, then bamboo, iron wood and lingua wood. What makes me so angry and full of regret is that my land, which belongs to the Ariks clan, as well as the Kebar, Arumi, Manimbu, Wasabiti, Inam and Amawi clans, all of it was full of sago trees ... Now, there is a corn company there in the place where there were sago trees and other plants. Most of the people who come from the city, they drive straight to the place where the corn farm is in cars. In the past, all that could be seen were sago leaves and reeds. But now, it is only a corn plantation. Corn is not planted by nature, but by humans. Sago trees, cogon grass, ironwood and lingua wood, all of those are not planted by humans.*

*There are no benefits from corn. [First] where will it be sold? Where will it be stored? Where is the market? Where will the employees be brought in from? Then, the second one is that it has harmed us because there are no more big trees there and the area has become barren. That is not what we want.*

### **A declaration of women from across the Kebar Valley**

“We, the Mpur women of Kebar Valley, are the rightful owners of Kebar Valley which has been passed down to us from generation to generation since time immemorial. This land, water and forest is ours.

We as Mpur women feel lost and hopeless when the forest, which is a place for farming, gathering vegetables, hunting and other things, is taken away. The land and forest are priceless treasures. Without the company, we can live. But we cannot live without the land and the forest which is our mother.

We Mpur women are extremely dependent on the land and the forest as a source of food and drink which sustains the lives of the Mpur people. We hope that the government will protect our rights and our property. It should not be the other way around, where the government surrenders our rights and property to the company without considering our connection to our land and forests.

We, as Mpur Soor women, demand that the government restore the forest and environment which the company has destroyed”

February 2020

*In reality, all of our land was going to be taken over by the company, but we didn't want that ... We resisted, we fought the company and they lost their opportunity. So, the forest is still as it was before. There are forests and reeds all the way to the bottom where there is a large sago grove. There is iron wood, matoa wood, lingua wood, and others. It is all timber and we do not want to give it to the company ... We do not want to because we can use the timber to build our houses. We also have rattan and vegetables such as genemo, both of which can be used and eaten. The forest is our mother, we don't want to sell her to anyone. It is owned by us and us alone. KA*

In February 2020, AJAR and PWG, along with KPKC, facilitated a three-day workshop with 39 women living in Kebar Valley. The majority of these women are from the Mpur clan, the indigenous people of Kebar Valley. Some are from other parts of Papua and moved to the Valley after marrying Mpur men. The women come from several villages located in Kebar, East Kebar, Manebar, and Senopi Districts. They are all Protestant, the dominant religion of Kebar Valley. Because they are members of the Christian Evangelical Church of Papua, the workshop took place in one of the churches located in Anjai Village. In comparison to women from other regions in this research, the majority are enthusiastic about discussing customary land. They spoke effortlessly about the history of their land with an understanding of every detail of the land:

*Even small rivers have names. Everything has a name. Papua is not an empty land. Rivers which have disappeared have names, as well as rivers which have water and every creature living within them.* Nurlaela Lamasitudju, PAR Facilitator

## Mapping Kebar: topography, ecology, and demography

In the language of Mpur, the indigenous people of Kebar Valley are known as ‘niek jirouw’ which means ‘flat land’ or ‘valley’. Kebar Valley is located in the Birds Head of West Papua, sandwiched between the Tamrau mountain range to the north, and the Afak mountain range to the south. The valley is made up of savanna grasslands and pristine forests, with a rich river system which makes the surrounding land fertile. There are many rivers that irrigate this valley, including the Kasi, Api, and Apiri Rivers.

Kebar Valley is inhabited by a number of ethnic groups, such as the Mpur, Ileres, and Miyah. Within the Mpur group alone, there are seven different clan groups. The different ethnic groups are connected through strong trade, social and economic relations, and through marriage. While the responsibility for Kebar Valley has fallen to the Mpur, the role that they play in the broader lives of indigenous communities cannot be underestimated. The Mpur are on the frontline in the struggle against the PT. BAPP company’s expanding operations. This is because much of their customary land and natural resources have become targets for ‘exploration’ and land clearing.

### The Mpur indigenous group consists of seven sub-groups:

1. **Mpur Ajiw:** comprising the Anari, Awori, Atai, Aremi, Aropi, Awabiti, Ayeri, Abiri, and Arwam clans.
2. **Mpur Mawabit:** comprising the Jambuani, Asimi, and Api clans.
3. **Mpur Dru:** comprising the Ariks, Kebar, Anjai, and Ajoi clans.
4. **Mpur Manabuat:** comprising the Wasabiti, Inam, Awuri, Amawi, and Duri clans.
5. **Mpur Maniun:** comprising the Neori, Majiwi, Ambuak, Rumbesu, Bame, Bijanawi, and Waniopi clans.



6. **Mpur Masam:** comprising the Maniun, and Manimbu clans.
7. **Mpur Mawabuan:** comprising the Ajembuani, Asentwoi, Asiar, Ajokwapi, Mafiti, Songgreri, Ani, and Amuapon clans.<sup>1</sup>

The indigenous communities of Kebar Valley have an intimate connection with the natural environment. This closeness is clearly visible when they speak about their environment. They regard the forest as their mother, providing them, their ancestors, and future generations with life and wellbeing:

*This land and forest is my mother who gives me life and from whom I get food. Without the forest and land, I would die. My family and I, as well as other people in my house, live from this land and water. KA*

*For me, the forest is the life which was given to me by my ancestors who also lived in the forest. Before there was medicine, remedies could certainly be found in the forest. Before there were crops, everything came from the forest. They lived in the forest and today we must also continue to live in the forest. Even though there are now crops, our staple foods come from the forest. We can also get water using vines from the forest such as rattan vine, blackboard tree vine (tali kayu susu), palm and many more. KR*

This close connection with nature can be seen in their ability to use forest plants for natural medicines for a range of ailments, as traditional tools to find the truth about a certain issue, and as a way to communicate messages from one to another:

*This is a drawing of the red leaf elixir [called] ‘nibua bi’. In Indonesian, it is usually called sago leaf. If we’re sick, we use this elixir, [for] a cough, rheumatism, blood clotting, and fever. This leaf grows on its own in the forest. KM*

*There are different types of wood nettle leaves: pig leaves and normal leaves. In the past, if our elders were sick and there was no medicine, they*

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<sup>1</sup> Suara Papua, 8 December 2019, “Lembah Kebar dalam Deru Perubahan Simbolik: Analisa Kepentingan Aksi Tolak PT. BAPP,” <[suarapapua.com/2019/12/08/lembah-kebar-dalam-deru-perubahan-simbolik-analisa-kepentingan-aksi-tolak-pt-bapp/](http://suarapapua.com/2019/12/08/lembah-kebar-dalam-deru-perubahan-simbolik-analisa-kepentingan-aksi-tolak-pt-bapp/)>.

*would use wood nettle leaves as a rub. Kayu susu tree (blackboard tree) is used as a medicine for malaria. The sap is used to treat a cough. KX*

*[My symbol] is ironwood. [The trees] grow on their own. All Papuans have ironwood. The wood is used to build houses and the sap can be used as a way of finding the truth. A person's hand is put into the sap. If their hand gets burnt, it means that they are wrong. If nothing happens, it means that they are right. KZ and RO*

*[My symbol is] is the message vine. In the past, people could not read or write, there was no paper, there were no pens. In the past, missionaries would tie up vines when they travelled. For example, if there were vines tied together it meant they had been gone for three days and that they would return in another three days. RG*

Communities in Kebar Valley live by using natural resources found in their traditional forests. Women grow staples like sweet potato, cassava, banana, chili, hibiscus, and water spinach. These are grown for family consumption but can be sold in the village if there are high yields. They have small fruit farms where they grow bananas, papaya, coconut, matoa, and langsats to sell:

*I have a garden with bananas and taro. The fruit is for us to eat and I also have a side business making and selling chips. The fruit is also for our relatives when they come over, we give it to them. A large bunch of bananas is worth Rp5,000 and a small one is Rp1,000. KQ*

In addition to farming, communities in Kebar use their forests for hunting wild animals like pigs and deer. They fish in the rivers around the village and catch snakehead murrel (*gastor*), toraja snakehead fish (*gabus toraja*), Nile tilapia (*nila*) and catfish (*lele*). A number of people also raise animals to supplement their incomes:

*If we manage the pigs properly, we can all live off them. If somebody needs it, they can buy a pig. A standard pig [can be sold for], Rp3 million, Rp5 million, Rp8 million or Rp10 million. We got a shock from the income these pigs made. People immediately came and [we] made good money. KK*

They sell high-quality timber such as ironwood and matoa, which grows in their traditional forests. This timber is sold to people who want to build houses. They can also sell Kebar Grass which grows wild. This type of grass is only found in Kebar and has many health benefits. It is often used as a natural remedy, particularly for increasing fertility.<sup>2</sup> A number of women use resources from the forest to make woven bags and knit wallets:

*I got married in 1998. I lived with my husband for five years and didn't have any children. This was until my husband's family got angry with him. A cousin here in Atai gave [me] medicine, it was Kebar Grass. After that, I had a child. [Now] I have seven children. KP*

*I usually sell Kebar Grass and get Rp100,000. 1 kg is normally Rp500,000. KR*

As well as using natural resources, many women have jobs as permanent staff in government offices or with village officials. Others have casual or part time positions in the health center, school, or church. In their spare time, some women sell food outside their houses, like donuts or soft drinks that they buy in Manokwari.

## Indigenous women in Kebar Valley

During discussions, we found that women have the right to be involved in the management of customary land. However, we did not obtain further information about how their rights compare with those of men:

*I can manage my customary land with my family. But this stone is heavy because my family cannot get us all together to manage different aspects of our customary land. RA, during the Stone and Flower Activity.*

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<sup>2</sup> Bursatriannyo, 2 December 2013, "Rumput Kebar Peningkat Kesuburan Kandungan," *Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan Perkebunan*, <[perkebunan.litbang.pertanian.go.id/rumput-kebar-peningkat-kesuburan-kandungan/](http://perkebunan.litbang.pertanian.go.id/rumput-kebar-peningkat-kesuburan-kandungan/)>. A. I. Rusyawardani et al., 2020, Effect of kebar grass (*biophytum petersianum*) extract on the seminiferous tubules in male mice (*mus musculus*) treated with 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (tcdd). *Advances in Animal and Veterinary Sciences* 8, no. 5: 519-523, <[nexusacademicpublishers.com/table\\_contents\\_detail/4/1410/html](http://nexusacademicpublishers.com/table_contents_detail/4/1410/html)>.

Clan leaders will often deliberately exclude women from decision-making processes:

*We as women have the right to discuss and defend [land]. But sometimes we are not considered, maybe [they] feel that we are not capable or don't know how to even though we do ... As indigenous women, we have specific rights. We as women have ten basic rights, we must also be involved in governance and customs. All this time, I have paid attention to how men always lead when we want to achieve something. Women are not involved enough yet. KJ*

Deliberate efforts to exclude women extend into the realm of education. Participants told of how they were unable to complete their education because they did not receive support from their families:

*[When] I was going into the second grade of senior high school, my teacher asked for the tuition fee, but I didn't have the money. I asked my older siblings, but my uncle did not provide it. Eventually I left school because there was no money for paying the fees. KG*

*I graduated from junior high school and went to the city to start senior high school, but my older brothers forbid me. I was ordered to return home because I had a younger brother who was continuing with school. Now he has become a teacher and teaches here. I came home and looked for my friends until I found a partner and got married ... I work in the garden growing vegetables, cassava, bananas, chilli and onion. KM*

*I went to the state junior high school in Kebar and graduated in 1984 but I did not continue after that. My parents did not continue paying my school fees. KQ*

Despite this, Kebar has better education than the rest of the region. Communities in Kebar were some of the first in Papua to experience formal education. In 1960, two residents of Kebar Valley, Nikodemus Baru and Yohanes Kebar, were the first to receive a bachelor's degree. Kebar Valley has had a state junior high school since 1983, years before other regions. Thanks to this, parents no longer need to send their children to Manokwari to continue their education.



Another issue facing women in Kebar is domestic violence. Participants told of their experiences of violence at the hands of their partners resulting from alcohol abuse, financial issues, health problems, or inability to conceive:

*When I did not yet have any children, my partner's family were angry with me. I just cried; I did not respond. KP*

*My husband wants to get married now, [he] has been having an affair for the last four years. My husband hit me with pieces of wood and a machete, he chased me with a pistol, but I ran. Shots were fired in the betel nut trees. If he is drunk, then he will come and close the door, then it is certain that I will be hit. [Providing] food and drink is my responsibility. I don't know where his wages go ... I work in the office [and] in the church. When I get home, I also have to cook. He just sits around on his phone, there is already internet in our house. [He] goes to the city saying that he has official business to deal with. But when he comes home, he has nothing. If I speak, he hits me. RG*

*My husband, maybe it is because of alcohol, but our house is not safe. Maybe if he did not drink alcohol, everything would be okay. If I talk about it with his younger siblings, they misunderstand me. I said that was because they have not married yet. If they were married, they would understand. Normally, if I work then my husband doesn't work. I tried to speak to him about it, but he got angry, so it was better for me to live with my aunt ... I experienced violence before I had a child. I was locked in a room until I asked to go home. There was a car, so I went home to my mother and father. After a number of months, my husband and his family came and apologized to my parents and I returned home again. But as it turned out, [he] was still drinking. He gets drunk with his younger siblings. They drink the local palm drink. I experience violence when he is drunk. If [he is] not drunk, it is pretty safe. KU*

*I only went to school until the fifth grade of primary school, then I followed my boyfriend and we immediately got married ... My husband used to drink often, but he quit when our daughter was sick. My husband often hits me. Until today we usually fight over providing for the family. KO*

*I don't feel safe living in the family home even though my husband never drinks [alcohol]. I am hit every day with a hammer. I just give in. I don't*

*resist, I just stay silent. I just follow the word of God and surrender. My husband suffers from deafness. So, maybe it is because he mishears me that he hits me. When he was young, he and his father had a fight. After being hit, his hearing became like it is now. He goes out and talks with people but then challenges them because he can't hear properly. There is a proverb which says that tranquil water will one day suddenly explode. So, maybe he is like that not just because he suffers from deafness, but also because of his character. RH*

In the past, this region suffered high mortality rates. Many participants explained that they have had children or family members who died suddenly and to this day they do not know the cause of death:

*My husband passed away during a solar eclipse on 9 March. Maybe it was due to poison, I don't know. [He] just passed away suddenly. After he went to Sausapor, he was already feeling sick ... My third child, a boy, passed away after having a fever for one day. He passed away suddenly, like his father. RC*

*My husband passed away in 2014, I don't know what from. It was the same as when my child passed away suddenly. RA*

*I have had five children, all of them passed away when they were still in the womb. RG*

*[When] my fifth child was in primary school, he died from mysterious causes in 2001. My sixth child passed away in 2003. In 2005, my youngest child was born, a boy. Two have passed away due to miscarriages. KG*

*Three children passed away in infancy because I worked so much in the garden [and] carried food. There is a hospital, but it is far away. My husband helps by carrying timber. RB*

## The arrival of Christianity in Kebar Valley

Christian missionaries reached Kebar in 1947, arriving in an area called Muara Ariatem. As well as the Gospel, the missionaries introduced groundnuts. Since then, groundnuts have become a staple in Kebar:

*Groundnuts arrived with the gospel. At that time, the elders started [cultivating groundnuts] on their farms. A portion was sold, and a portion was used to support the services here. Before, our parents did not know about almsgiving. KX*

Following the arrival of the missionaries, Christianity spread throughout Kebar. In 1974, the first church was established in Inam Village by the Christian Evangelical Church of Papua. In 1997, a monument was unveiled in Inam Village to commemorate 50 years since the arrival of the gospel in Kebar Valley:

*My father was a church and a traditional leader, his name was Gasper Asentowi. He was the first to spread the gospel in Kebar. He retired from the Kebar Forestry Agency. My father was one of the first people in Kebar to go to school. He received the highest mark in the primary school, so he was sent to Manokwari. RG*

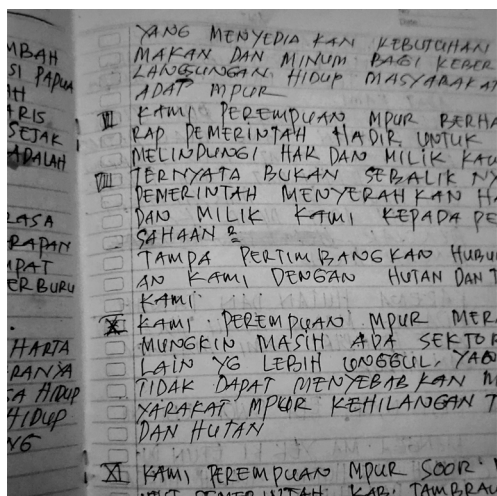
The church provides equal space for women to be active in religious affairs. Many Mpur women hold important positions in the church ministry, serving both the congregational council and church fellowships. Their capacity to hold high positions in the church demonstrates that women from the valley can be empowered, despite living in a patriarchal society:

*Even though I don't have higher education, I was elected by the Church for two terms as the secretary of the Women's Fellowship. Recently, I was appointed the coordinator of the PW at the Kebar District level for two terms. [I also have] a small position in the community as a female leader.KJ*

*I live with my husband and we have one child. I was chosen to serve the council over five years. Now, I have been appointed as the Chairman of PW for two terms ... I also work as the Head of Developmental Affairs in the village. RA*

*I work only for God, helping out in the council. I have a position in the church as the Chairman of the PW. [I also receive] income as the Secretary of the Village Deliberative Council. Per month I receive Rp300,000 and I am paid every three months. KM*

The Church continues to play an important role in community life, and this role is not merely restricted to religious ceremonies. The Church plays



Photos by AJAR/PWG team, February 2020.



an active role in the protection of human rights and has become a bridge between communities and the government when issues arise over development.<sup>3</sup> The role of the Church is evident when local communities have resisted company operations on their land. In December 2017, KPKC GKITP came to Kebar to help local communities prevent the entry of PT. BAPP onto their customary land. They drafted a letter to the Tambrauw Regent after he said that he could not refuse the company's entry if there was no resistance from the community.<sup>4</sup>

## Land conflict: divide and conquer – the politics of fragmentation (*pemekaran*) and land acquisition

Kebar Valley was previously made up of the Kebar and Senopi districts, under the administration of the Manokwari regency. In 2009, the valley became part of the Tambrauw regency after the government issued Constitutional Court Resolution No. 127/PUU-VII/2009. This saw the formation of the Tambrauw regency, incorporating parts of the Sorong and Manokwari regencies.<sup>5</sup> This expansion was accompanied by the expansion of districts and villages, creating new administrative boundaries, including the Kebar Valley.

The process of changing administrative boundaries has meant that clans and ethnic groups have had to adjust, and this has led to conflicts over land ownership. Fragmentation is part of the policy of 'divide and conquer'. New administrative boundaries allow for increased resources and social services through additional budgets and new positions in the local government. This approach benefits the interests of elites and entrepreneurs, as it allows new permits for natural resource extraction to be issued:

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<sup>3</sup> Elisa Sekenyap, 10 October 2018, "KPKC GKI Gelar Pameran HAM, Lingkungan Hidup dan Hak Masyarakat Adat" *Suara Papua*, <[suarapapua.com/2018/10/10/kpkc-gki-gelar-pameran-ham-lingkungan-hidup-dan-hak-masyarakat-adat/](http://suarapapua.com/2018/10/10/kpkc-gki-gelar-pameran-ham-lingkungan-hidup-dan-hak-masyarakat-adat/)>. Information also taken from PAR notes on "Indigenous land conflict in Tambrauw Regency: Mpur block corn company".

<sup>4</sup> Information from timelines notes.

<sup>5</sup> DPR-RI, "Perubahan Atas Undang-Undang Nomor 56 Tahun 2008 Tentang Pembentukan Kabupaten Tambrauw Di Propinsi Papua Barat", <[www.dpr.go.id/jdih/index/id/360](http://www.dpr.go.id/jdih/index/id/360)>.

*For us indigenous Mpur communities, we used to live in the valley clearing our gardens with machetes and hatchets. Now we have witnessed development. The chainsaws came and took away the trees that we used to have. Heavy machinery began to arrive. They evicted us and devastated the people. What has happened now is that our community thinks that we are going to die. If the forest disappears, it means that we will die, we will vanish from this land ... If the company destroys these trees, our community will die. RN*

PT. BAPP is owned by the IG Group and arrived in Kebar Valley in 2015.<sup>6</sup> Initial plans were to establish oil palm plantations covering an area of over 19,000 ha. The Mpur, Ileres, and Miyah communities rejected the government's plan to repurpose their customary land. PT. BAPP therefore changed its plans and decided to establish corn plantations instead. Representatives from the Arumi and Kebar clans signed an agreement to release part of their customary land, however, the authenticity of the signatures to this agreement were later questioned by the community:

*The company entered, beforehand they had obtained a fake signature from somewhere - it was in the name of the Ariks and Wasabiti clans who own land there ... But my clan [Ariks] did not know that the company had come to negotiate with us. Later, we were shocked when the company arrived with an excuse that it [the plantation] was just a two-year trial. But it has already been a number of years now ... that corn company tricked us. Their aim is to fill [the land] with palm oil. RI*

The presence of PT. BAPP in Kebar Valley is an example of how the arrival of companies becomes a significant challenge to indigenous communities. Land grabbing and unsustainable land management practices threatens the socio-cultural life, traditional livelihoods, and sources of water and food of local communities:

*In 2015, the company came to clear land. They camped in the middle of the reeds which is owned by the Amauyu Asabiti clan. [They] stayed there and cleared land until the sago forest was levelled. The farming areas were*

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<sup>6</sup> PUSAKA, 15 November 2018, "Suku Mpur Menuntut Perusahaan PT. BAPP Segera Keluar dari Tanah Suku Mpur", <pusaka.or.id/2018/11/suku-mpur-menuntut-perusahaan-pt-bapp-segera-keluar-dari-tanah-suku-mpur/>.

*cleared away and all of the longstanding plants were cut down. After the community saw that the land grab was becoming more and more widespread, they refused to accept it because their areas for hunting and farming, as well as the natural ecosystem, had been destroyed.”<sup>7</sup>*

Timeline of PT. BAPP's entry into the Kebar Valley	
2007	<p>Sorong Regent, Muhammad Tangke, issues Letter No. 503/274 to the Governor of West Papua. The letter states his support for an oil palm plantation project led by PT. BAPP but does not mention a specific location.</p> <p>At the same time, Manokwari Regent, Dominggus Mandacan, issues Location Permit No. 522.2/931 allocating 23,000 ha PT. BAPP to establish oil palm plantations.</p>
July 2007	Governor of West Papua, Abraham Atururi, issues Recommendation Letter No. 525/572/GPB/2007 to the Minister of Forestry. It recommends the release of 40,000 ha of forest to PT. BAPP. More than 17,000 ha is to come from Sorong Regency, and 23,000 ha from Manokwari Regency.
November 2008	Parliament issues Law No. 56/2008 stipulating the formation of a new regency, Tambrau, which is independent of Sorong Regency. The regulation does not mention the Kebar and Senopi districts.
2009	Minister for Forestry, MS Kaban, issues a principal agreement to release 39,600 ha of forest area to PT. BAPP to establish palm oil plantations under Decree No. S.10/Menhut-II/2009. The agreement does not mention Tambrau Regency.

<sup>7</sup> Account provided by PAR Facilitator.

September 2009	A group of indigenous leaders file a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court. They argue that Law No. 56/2008 is unconstitutional because it does not recognize the laws and customs of indigenous communities.
2010	Constitutional Court Resolution No. 127/PUU-VII/2009 states that Law No. 56/2008 contradicts the 1945 Constitution if it does not include Amberbaken, Kebar, Senopi and Mubrani districts.
2013	Law No. 14/2013 is passed amending Law No. 56/2008 to reflect the Constitutional Court's resolution to include the Kebar and Senopi districts in Tambrauw Regency.
2014	Minutes from a meeting discussing the boundaries of PT. BAPP's palm oil plantations are signed in Sausapor by Regent Gabriel Asem. It is also signed by the Kebar regent and a number of officials from the Senopi District, the Wausin, Anjai, and Inam Villages as well as three 'traditional leaders'.
July 2014	Shares in PT. BAPP are sold to PT. CAP, a company connected to the SG Group.
November 2014	During his last day in office, Minister for Forestry Zulkifli Hasan issues Decree No. 873/Menhut-II/2014 which releases 19,368 ha of forest to PT. BAPP to establish palm oil plantations. However, the map which is attached to the decree, contains a significant error, namely it shows the full 32,390 ha as requested by the company. This is despite the decree explicitly stating that 13,021 ha will not be cleared because it is pristine forest.



2015	With operational permission from the Ministry of Forestry, PT. BAPP holds three meetings with indigenous leaders. During the final meeting, BAPP distributes ‘permission money’, also known as ‘payments of good faith’ to six clans. These are the Wasabiti, Amawi, Wanimeri, Arumi, Kebar and Ariks clans. The indigenous leaders later state that they believed the agreement only covered savanna or grasslands.
September 2015	<p>Communities reject the attempts of PT. BAPP to establish palm oil plantations. Four clans return the money which they received and claim that the agreement which they signed had been changed.</p> <p>The company alter their plans and choose to establish corn plantations with new approval from the Tambrauw regent for Food Crop Cultivation and Processing under Decree No. 521/296/2015. The Decree is signed on 28 September 2015 and covers an area of more than 19,368 ha in Kebar and Senopi districts. Another Decree, No. 521/297/2015, provides permission for the establishment of a Food Crop Cultivation Business (IUTP or Food Crop Cultivation Business License) and processing factory in the same area. Members of the community are convinced that the permit cannot come into effect because the company did not complete an Environment Impact Analysis (AMDAL).<sup>8</sup></p>
17 November 2017	The Mpur declaration against the project is signed by traditional owners from the Wasabiti, Amawi, Wanimeri, Arumi, Kebar and Ariks clans. <sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Papua Barat News, 5 September 2018, “Izin Operasi PT BAPP di Lembah Kebar Harus Ditinjau Ulang,” <papuabarnews.co/editorial/izin-operasi-pt-bapp-di-lembah-kebar-harus-ditinjau-ulang/>.

<sup>9</sup> PUSAKA et al, 2017, “Catatan Akhir Tahun 2017: Perampasan Tanah, Kekerasan dan Deforestasi Hutan di Papua” 8, <pusaka.or.id/assets/2018/01/Laporan-Bersama-Catatan-Akhir-Tahun-2017-Vrs.pdf>.

4 August 2018	PT. BAPP is granted permit extension No. 570/042/ DPMPPPT / 2018 by the Tambrauw Regency's Investment, Licensing, Labourpower and Transmigration Agency of (DPMPPPT).
30 August 2018	A second declaration is made by communities rejecting the arrival of PT. BAPP. <sup>10</sup>
November 2018	A Special Committee formed by the West Papuan Parliament concludes its investigation into this case and recommends that PT. BAPP returns the land back to the community. <sup>11</sup>
February 2019	The Local Parliament of West Papua Province sends a letter of recommendation to the President and other departments asking for revocation of the permit given to PT. BAPP.
April 2019	For the first time, the community receives a copy of the company's permit extension which was granted in August 2018. <sup>12</sup>

## Negative impacts of external parties entering Kebar Valley

After Tambrauw was established as a definitive regency in 2014, communities in Kebar began to experience developments in the region. In the same year, communities in Kebar witnessed the construction of the new Kebar airport and the first Telkomsel tower.<sup>13</sup> These two developments created opportunities for the local community to interact with the outside world, and for people

<sup>10</sup> Papua Kini, 31 August 2018, "Warga segel pabrik jagung dan sawit BAPP di Kebar Tambrauw," <papuakini.co/2018/08/31/warga-segel-pabrik-jagung-dan-sawit-bapp-di-kebar-tambrauw/>.

<sup>11</sup> Redaksi Papua Kita, 16 February 2019, "DPRPB rekomendasikan PT BAPP segera angkat kaki dari tanah adat suku Mpur," <papuakita.com/tambrauw/dprpb-rekomendasikan-pt-bapp-segera-angkat-kaki-dari-tanah-adat-suku-mpur.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Suara Papua, 24 August 2019, "Urgensi Peninjauan Kembali Perizinan dan Perjanjian Usaha Perkebunan," <suarapapua.com/2019/08/24/urgensi-peninjauan-kembali-perizinan-dan-perjanjian-usaha-perkebunan/>.

<sup>13</sup> Gathered through timeline notes.

from outside the region to enter Kebar. Migrants began arriving in the following years, especially in 2015 when PT. BAPP began operations and employed many workers from outside Papua. In 2017, the Indonesian army established the Army Strategic Reserve Command headquarters in Anjai Village.

## The history of the military in Kebar

Kebar is where the Papuan Independence Organisation or OPM first carried out armed resistance against the Indonesian government. Johannes Jambuani led this resistance on 26 July 1965 along with 400 people from the Karon and Ayamaru indigenous groups.<sup>14</sup> On 28 July 1965, the OPM attacked an Indonesian military post in Arfai. Eighteen members of the military and four OPM guerrillas were killed. The OPM followed up with a series of attacks in Manokwari and Sorong. In response, the Indonesian army, under Brigadier General R. Kartidjo, launched the first counter-insurgency operation in Papua named ‘Operation Sadar’. The aim of Operation Sadar was to destroy the OPM in a number of areas in Manokwari, including Kebar, Saukorem, Prafi, and Ransiki, and to assert the authority of the military in Papua. The operation was carried out in a number of villages which had become the core of the OPM’s resistance. During the operation, mandatory reporting was introduced, villages were burnt down and air raids caused widespread destruction, including to the destruction of the church roof.<sup>15</sup> On 25 August 1965, the scope of this operation was broadened to Manokwari and surrounding areas. Kebar became the centre of anti-OPM operations by the Indonesian military.

*I was born on 6 July 1965 in the forests of Tanah Merah, in the mountains above Kebar. In 1965, there were military operations by the Indonesian Army (TNI). KY*

<sup>14</sup> Suara Papua, 1 July 2020, “1 July 1971: Kilas Balik Batalyon Papua dan TPN-OPM,” <suarapapua.com/2020/07/01/1-juli-1971-kilas-balik-batalyon-papua-dan-tpn-opm/>.

<sup>15</sup> Fahri Salam, 1 December 2017, “1965: ‘Kekerasan Brutal’ Perdana Militer Indonesia di Papua,” Tirto ID, <tirto.id/1965-kekerasan-brutal-perdana-militer-indonesia-di-papua-cAYZ>.

The presence of companies and migrants in Kebar Valley led to a number of significant changes in the lives of indigenous communities. Many participants explained that local food security and traditional livelihoods are now under threat as a result of the degradation and disappearance of traditional forests. A number of participants recalled that much of their livestock was poisoned or stolen by company employees after straying into the corn plantations. Livestock in Kebar Valley roam freely and often enter corn plantations as it was previously a place where they could find food:

*My land is now gone because of the corn company. All the pigs, birds, and timber have already disappeared. I am sad and sorrowful. The sago and the big trees are gone. KD*

*There used to be a lot of fish, sago, deer and pigs in the swamplands which is where the company cleared. There were usually traditional events there. People from Jandurauw and Inam hunted there. But now there are already no deer, there are no pigs. This has happened because our village is close to the company, the pigs have all died out. Jandurauw is the same. [This is] because people from the company put out poison. The pigs go there because they want to eat the worms but accidentally eat the poison, many of them have died. There are also people who steal and eat [the pigs]. They dig holes in the ground and then cover them with leaves and small pieces of wood. They cut up a little bit of cassava to trick [the pigs]. When the pigs come, they don't think that there is a hole in the ground, and they walk over to eat the cassava. After that, the pigs fall into the hole underneath where they die. The people lift them out and eat them. Otherwise, they will bury [the dead pig]. These pigs are very important. There used to be a lot of pigs, but the company [employees] have stolen and shot those, some of which were pregnant. I have lost 5 pigs ... The company is behind my house. They sprinkle rat poison in the cornfield which is then eaten by the pigs. Before the company arrived, I had all of my pigs. Now we are crestfallen because much of our sago has vanished. The deer are no more, the fish that we used to catch are gone. RA*

The presence of the company, both directly and indirectly, has had implications for biodiversity and ecological sustainability. An example is the declining population of Kebar deer. The establishment of plantations



has led to the deer's feeding grounds being cleared. At the same time, company employees and the security officers often hunt wild deer in Kebar Valley:

*I still have my nature [indigenous land], but the police normally stop us hunting. We put up a signpost, but the police threw it away. In the afternoon there still used to be deer. But now there are none, all the birds are gone. KS*  
*The other people who live there, they go out looking for food, they bring outsiders with them too. They go out hunting deer [and] birds. The main thing is that they wreck nature, the police and the others. KW*

As well as deer, this area is a habitat for cockatoos, known by their local name yago. However, deforestation by the company and hunting by migrants has meant that it is increasingly difficult to find these birds:

*Before there were cockatoos, but now there are none left. They used to be close to the riverbank but now they are not there. Maybe it is because of the company or because of the road which was opened. There are also a lot of rifles so a lot of them have been hunted. KM*

The presence of the company appears to be affecting the quality of the river water. Populations of fish have continued to decline, and the community has found it difficult to catch enough fish to satisfy their daily needs:

*I asked the company, if they wanted by coming into our lives, how would our lives be? Our lives are already difficult, what will it be like for our children? The forest is very useful. Once a company entered my village via the river which I have drawn here, they entered via the Apiri River. We complained, we were angry. We want to find fish in the river but cannot. The forest can no longer be used for farming. For us to use them, we need the forest and nature to be pristine. KS*

*Before, there were many fish. The water was nice and clear but now it is dirty. Now there are dams, the water is cloudy. RM*

*This river used to have many fish, but now there are none because people electrocuted the fish. Soldiers and the people here, they bring the soldiers with them and go out hunting. Later we forbade them, they were furious. KB*

Participants complained of flash flooding that they are forced to endure because of illegal logging near rivers, as well as rocks and sand being taken from the rivers in their traditional forests:

*Now it is already different, the trees on the riverbank are sparse. There is frequent flooding because there are less trees and bamboo. Sand and rocks are also usually taken to be used as building material or for roads. KR*

*Now this forest has been cleared, particularly on the riverbanks. If there is a flood, the water comes into the village. We need rocks and sand from the river. Over time, the water might decrease until [the river] is small. That is why we must all preserve it together. RM*

*There are no longer [trees] on this land because of plantations. The big trees are already gone because they have been turned into plantations. Around the village, people normally steal rocks and sand. [ It is done by] people from here with outsiders. KB*

The loss of forests has triggered conflict between clans and has caused rifts between indigenous communities and migrants:

*Another clan took this area from us Anjai clan without respecting us. They told the government to come in and start taking our sand and rocks which we ourselves have never taken. So how can we find a solution? How can we take care of this place in the future when we cannot take care of it today? People came to cut down all the trees, then somebody came and picked me on a motorbike and told me to come and clear those soldiers off. RM*

*Nature is on the land owned by the Neori clan. We, Neori, do not wreck it. Outsiders came and planted there and after that there was a flash flood in 2017. People on the edge of the village also wreck the Maniun Forest. KB*

As well as causing damage to the natural environment, the presence of companies has harmed younger generations in Kebar. Many company employees, the majority of them from outside Papua, have sexually harassed young girls from Kebar:

*Between 2017 and 2019, company employees were dating young girls from the village who then fell pregnant. After that, they abandoned them.*<sup>16</sup>

## The response of indigenous communities in Kebar

KA, an indigenous woman from Kebar, explained how the company first arrived on her customary land. According to KA, the Regency Agency for Agriculture was involved in bringing the company and community together for the first time:

*In the beginning, the company came through the Tambrauw Regency Agriculture Agency. They said that it was just a trial for the Agency. Eventually our community gave permission, but only to clear grassland, not the forest ... The permission which we granted was only for them to work for two years. The company cleared all the way up to the forest. After that there was fighting between traditional owners from the Arumi, Wasabiti, Ariks and Wanimeri clans. We fought because the company had destroyed the forest ... It was Christmas when they destroyed the forest. It was December, so we were busy. We did not know that they had already destroyed the forest from the location in Wasabiti to here.*

The indigenous community asked the police to help end deforestation which the company was carrying out. However, their efforts were unsuccessful:

*At that time, the company cleared the forest next to us here, it is already gone. They built this road to get to Kebar. At the time, we did not want them to open this road, but the company built the road saying, “we only want to use this road to get to the location in Kebar”. Eventually, we gave permission. It turns out that they wanted to clear the forest ... After that, we carried out a blockade ... People from the local police station came and put pressure on us. We did not want to [give in], but the police came here a number of times. Eventually we said, “we are the traditional owners of the Arumi land. We say to the head of the local police station: we will clear the blockade and remove our houses from the road if you guarantee that*

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<sup>16</sup> Taken from timeline notes.

*the company will not clear the forest next to, and above, us here". We were shocked because it turned out that in 1-2 months, they had already cleared this forest. The forests above and below [were cleared] within which was ironwood and matoa wood. KA*

They complained to the district military commander, but without success. However, a member of the community was beaten by the police when he demonstrated in August 2018. People were demonstrating because up to 500 ha of traditional forest had been cleared without their consent.<sup>17</sup>

*People from the company came to measure the location. They were measuring the forest which they wanted to clear. My older brother rode a motorbike from there. He hit a company overseer who was there and then a member of Brimob hit my brother on the shoulder with his rifle butt. My brother was silent after that, he returned and told the community. We came on motorbikes and we had a big fight. We had a big fight with the company employees, from overseers to company heads. We reported it to the District Military Commander (Dandim). The Commander ordered my brother who had been hit with a rifle butt to come to him in Manokwari and give evidence there. KA*

In November 2018, representatives from the community travelled to Jakarta to meet with a number of state agencies, including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry for the Economy, The Ministry for Agrarian Affairs, and the Corruption Eradication Commission, to resolve the issue. They were told that this was an issue for the regional government, and not for the central government:

*It is not just the government which has no justice, but the whole community here. If we can remove this company, then we will feel like there has been justice. If there is still a little bit [of the company], we won't feel like there has been justice. RI*

At the time of writing, the regional government does not have a concrete strategy for stopping the operations of PT. BAPP. The company still operates

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<sup>17</sup> "PT. BAPP Serobot Tanah Adat Seluas 193 h Milik Suku Mpur di Lembah Kebar, Tambrau," *Suara Papua*, 2 March 2018.



and uses security forces to protect the area which scares the communities who live there:

*This forest was cleared silently, in secret ... I was shocked because the whole forest was already gone ... At that time they had security: Mobile Brigade, Police, soldiers, all of them. After that, our community was scared. KA*

Despite feeling scared, the determination of women to defend their customary land has never waned. The defence of their land must continue because land is the source of life for them and their grandchildren:

*Why is it that these women from far-away lands can come to Kebar Valley? They don't have land here but why can they come from far-away places? In my opinion, this box [the framework for the stone and flower activity] is all stones because all we see is red [indicating the location of the company]. The company's plan is for 19,000 hectares which means that Greater Kebar is already gone. So do not say, 'just relax, Asentowi is still green', because it is not. I will not live forever. If I die, who will defend the rights of my children? For me personally, I ask that we form a network. If we can do that, then there are things which we will be able to achieve. KJ*

Women are aware of the risks they have to bear because of their struggle. This was expressed by two young women from Kebar who helped facilitate the research:

*If we want to struggle for our land, then there are risks which we must face. We cannot hope that our positions or what we have in the government will remain there forever. There needs to be risks; to get what we want there are things which we must lose. We must be prepared to lose positions and status so that we can preserve this place. For me, positions, money and status are not everything. What is important is our life, that is all. RO*

*There are risks which we must take on. I do not try to speak for others, just myself. I went to university which took a lot out of me. I could have got a job if I wanted to, but that is the risk that we take on ... I have a bachelor's degree which I have left behind. These are the risks which we must bear ... If we discuss the past, there were people who became victims, it's not just about losing your job ... we must fight for the truth. RP*



Moi communities in Sorong, August 2020.

## Sorong Regency: The defense of traditional land by Moi women



SA is a Moi woman, 24 years old and currently living in Klasaman. She grows sago, lemongrass, galangal, banana, pineapple, cassava, and vegetables which she sells the market.

She chose land and sago as symbols to describe herself, because “we see land as life, and sago has been our staple for years and years. Land and sago are what give us life”.

The land her family own is located in an area of Sorong called ‘Aimas’, which is now bordered by significant development projects. Speaking of the sago trees which her family harvest, she said, “if the government comes and clears our sago garden, we will sit around crying and full of regret because once the sago trees are gone it means we can no longer live”.

Her ancestral lands have been impacted by economic development projects, like natural resource extraction. “For a long time, part of our land was used by either company...for gas exploration because there are gas reserves in the area”.

More recently, her traditional lands have been threatened by the Sorong Special Economic Zone. “At the moment, part of the land where we grow sago has been destroyed for the development of a road. There has certainly been dialogue between me and Regent Malak, and an agreement has been reached that no more of our sago gardens will be destroyed in the interests of development. However, we are unsure about future government policies because until now Regent Malak has only given us a spoken guarantee, so we remain anxious”.

SA is committed to defending her family’s ancestral land in Sorong. “I usually hear stories from my father and mother, and I see for myself how close they are to nature. It is where we get our food and is a place for recreation. Something that I always reflect on is that if I had children in the future, would they still have it to enjoy? I always instil in myself the need to remember and to teach the need to protect the forest and the sago gardens”.

In August 2020, researchers from AJAR, the ‘Kaki Abu Legal Aid Institute’ and KPKC GKI TP, traveled to Jeflio and Arar villages in the district of Mayamuk. The team spent a week learning about indigenous Moi communities and their fight to protect their ancestral lands in the face of urbanisation,



encroachment of extractive industries and the development of a ‘Special Economic Zone’. Group discussions were held with women and other community members, while individual interviews were conducted with five Moi women.

## Land and Moi communities

The Moi are an indigenous group who inhabit the Bird’s Head of West Papua. Their customary lands stretch across Malamoi, Raja Ampat, and parts of South Sorong.<sup>1</sup> There are eight Moi sub-groups in this part of West Papua – Moi Kelim, Moi Sigin, Abun Taat, Abun Jii, Klabra, Salkhma, Lemas, and Moi Maya.<sup>2</sup>

Land and the natural environment have particular importance for Moi communities. They are a source of livelihood and have supported Moi for generations. In both villages, women grow a range of produce including coconut, sago, banana, hibiscus, sweet potato, taro, lemongrass, pineapple, cassava, and galangal. These fruits and vegetables are grown for both family consumption and to generate income. The importance of land in supporting livelihoods was explained by SD from the village of Arar:

*I have a child who is already in the second grade of primary school, born in 2013. To protect land, we must teach this generation the importance of defending land as it is the source of life and is where our future lies. We need to go back to our old ways, back to the garden, because it is from there that we get our food. If there is no land, then where will we get food?*

Land has symbolic and religious importance. Symbolically, it is considered a home, a kitchen, a place where blood is spilled, and is spoken of as one’s mother.<sup>3</sup> In a religious sense, land is of the highest order. It is the source of

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<sup>1</sup> Jaringan Kerja Rakyat Papua, *Tanah Adat Masyarakat Moi Bukan Untuk Perkebunan Kelapa Sawit* (Jerat Papua, 2017), <[www.jeratpapua.org/2017/07/11/edisi-2-mei-juni-2017/](http://www.jeratpapua.org/2017/07/11/edisi-2-mei-juni-2017/)>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 1.

all creation. It controls the environment and is the way through which God gives life.<sup>4</sup>

Moi communities combine these two ways of thinking to create a system of customary law which does not distinguish between land, the ocean, the coast, rivers, lakes, animals, and plants.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between humans and customary land is extremely intimate. This is because their traditional lands are connected to the spirits of their ancestors as well as the religious qualities listed above.<sup>6</sup> According to SC, land holds particular significance for Moi women. “We, Moi women, view land as a mother who gives us milk, who gives life to all living people, especially to Moi communities”.

Although land plays a significant role in the lives of Moi women, they tend not to have equal rights or a strong voice within the structures of indigenous society. They do not have the right to discuss customary land. Only men who have completed their education in a traditional school are permitted to discuss customary land.

In Moi society, the process of becoming a leader involves the completion of various stages of traditional education known as ‘*kambik*’. After completing this process, boys (known as ‘*Nedla*’) are considered men and ready to become leaders.<sup>7</sup> *Nedla* need to have a comprehensive understanding of traditional customs and must have other abilities in fields like health, farming, society and culture, and economics.<sup>8</sup> This system of traditional governance was explained by SA:

*Those who have the right to discuss ulayat [both rights and land] are males who have completed their education in the traditional school. Meanwhile, males who have not yet completed this education are considered to be female. The age at which boys can start traditional education is really dependent on the family’s decision and whether the boy is ready. In my family, I have a brother who has been given rights from my father’s side*

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 1-4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

[Klaibin clan], at the same time my father did not complete the traditional education, he just understands the regulations, so we'll see what happens.

Every boy in Moi society must complete education in the traditional school. If a boy has not completed this education, he is not considered to be a man. My father did not complete the traditional education, but my grandfather [from my father's side] did complete the process; thus, he knows and has the capacity to speak about customary land. Meanwhile, my father only knows about the dowry payment, but not the customary land boundaries.

So here in Malamoi, the only people who discuss land boundaries are those who have already been to traditional school and have received a traditional education and have learnt about customary rules. In the Osok Clan, there is an uncle's position, held by my mother's stepbrother who has studied the traditional education and can therefore talk about customary boundaries issue. Meanwhile, my mother herself can only speak about issues concerning her village. SA

In recent times, many Moi communities have been marginalized and displaced from their ancestral lands. Marginalization and displacement are linked to three factors: transmigration; extractive industries, like palm oil; and, the Sorong Special Economic Zone.

## Transmigration

Like most parts of West Papua, Sorong has seen consistent inward migration of people from other parts of the Indonesian archipelago. According to Awas MIFEE, the percentage of non-Papuans living in West Papua was only 2% in 1959, increasingly slightly to 4% by 1971.<sup>9</sup> However, by 2000 it was 35% before increasing to 53.5% in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Awas MIFEE, October 2014, "Transmigration and Marginalisation," <awasmiffee.potager.org/?page\_id=71>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

One of the last studies of ethnic diversity in West Papua was in 2010.<sup>11</sup> This showed that in South Sorong Regency, the Tehid, one of the ethnic groups who inhabit the Bird's Head, were the largest ethnic group with 30.87% of the population.<sup>12</sup> However, this study found that Javanese were the largest ethnic group in both the Sorong Regency (41.46%) and Sorong City (13.79%).<sup>13</sup>

Many people migrated to Sorong on their own accord. Several women who participated in this research were born in other parts of Papua, like Biak and Raja Ampat, and many non-Papuan residents settled in the region as part of the 'transmigration' program in the 1980s. Many migrants married into Moi families and have since integrated into the local community. However, the transmigration program continues to create issues and tensions in relation to land:

*So, the problem is that the land owned by the Osok family was used as a location for transmigration without any agreement with the traditional owners ... other traditional land of the Osok clan in Sorong Regency [Aimas] was settled by transmigrants. However, from the very start there was never an agreement reached with the indigenous community or traditional owners. SB*

## Extractive industries

A significant proportion of customary Moi land has been cleared for industrial development and extractive industries. In the last ten years, Sorong has witnessed runaway development, including a 50-megawatt coal-fired power plant, an airport, a cement plant, a 390 km railway, and a container port. As well as these development projects, Sorong is facing rapid expansion of extractive industries, like palm oil.

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<sup>11</sup> A. Ananta et al, "Statistics on Ethnic Diversity in the Land of Papua, Indonesia," *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies* 3, no. 3 (2016), 458-474.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 466.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



In 2003, PT. KLI held significant logging concessions in Sorong.<sup>14</sup> In the following years however, PT. KLI began to move into the palm oil industry via two subsidiaries, PT. HIP and PT. IKS.<sup>15</sup> Both subsidiaries have been granted Plantation Business Permits by the Sorong government. There are at least six other companies that have been granted permission to develop palm oil on traditional Moi land.<sup>16</sup>

The expansion of palm oil plantations has had, and will continue to have, a number of negative implications for Moi communities. Among other things, these extractive industries have led to the loss of sites of historical importance and sacred places.<sup>17</sup> Plantations will also lead to more frequent natural disasters, such as landslides and floods which killed at least five people in Sorong in July 2020.<sup>18</sup>

## The Sorong Special Economic Zone

The Sorong Special Economic Zone was introduced under ‘Government Regulation Number 31 of 2016’ and was inaugurated by the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Darmin Nasution, in October 2019.<sup>19</sup> Covering an area of 523.7 ha, it is strategically situated on international trade routes between Australia and Asia.<sup>20</sup> This economic zone, however, intrudes on a significant amount of Moi traditional land. SH is a Biak woman who has

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<sup>14</sup> Y. L. Franky and S. Moran, *Atlas Sawit Papua* (Jakarta: Pusaka, 2015), 7-10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jaringan Kerja Rakyat Papua, *Tanah Adat Masyarakat Moi Bukan Untuk Perkebunan Kelapa Sawit* (Jerat Papua, 2017), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Michael, 19 July 2020, “Walikota Sorong Ungkap Dugaan Penyebab Banjir dan Longsor” *Kompas* (Jakarta), <[regional.kompas.com/read/2020/07/19/16311061/wali-kota-sorong-ungkap-dugaan-penyebab-banjir-dan-longsor?page=all](http://regional.kompas.com/read/2020/07/19/16311061/wali-kota-sorong-ungkap-dugaan-penyebab-banjir-dan-longsor?page=all)>.

<sup>19</sup> Sri Haryati Tobayin, 11 October 2019, “Minister Nasution Inaugurates 523.7 ha. Special Economic Zone in Sorong,” *Antara News*, <[en.antaranews.com/news/134510/minister-nasution-inaugurates-5237-ha-special-economic-zone-in-sorong](http://en.antaranews.com/news/134510/minister-nasution-inaugurates-5237-ha-special-economic-zone-in-sorong)>.

<sup>20</sup> Vietnam Plus, 12 October 2019, “Indonesian Inaugurates New Special Economic Zone in West Papua,” <[en.vietnamplus.vn/indonesia-inaugurates-new-special-economic-zone-in-west-papua/161955.vnp](http://en.vietnamplus.vn/indonesia-inaugurates-new-special-economic-zone-in-west-papua/161955.vnp)>.

lived in Arar since 1982. She tends a small plot, which is now considered part of the Special Economic Zone:

*As well as providing food for my family, the produce from the garden is also sold in Arar Village. At the moment I do not have any aspirations because the garden I have is now located in an area that they say is for the Special Economic Zone.*

The Special Economic Zone has already impacted negatively on indigenous women in Sorong. An issue raised by several women is the construction of a new road on their customary land:

*Then I asked my older sibling what the road is being built for, they answered that it was for a railway. I thought it would be a railway even though another company had already built a road and had paid traditional owners compensation money. But how could villagers use that road if it has already been taken by a company? It was not clear to us villagers whether our land would be cleared for a government road or a private road. I recently learnt that the road is not for a railway but has been used by KPKC in Podomoro for the last few months. So, the road is for private companies that will operate in the Special Economic Zone. SG*

*A part of the land is being used for the construction of a road for the Special Economic Zone. Not all Moi people knew about it and it only began last year. Until now, we are only aware of an area called Aimas which is where the sago gardens are. SA*

The central government has promised members of the community farming assistance, despite the fact that large areas of sago will be cleared for plantations:

*I did some training which was provided by the Industry Agency to learn about sago cultivation and recently we were given some tools to help cultivate sago. But then I thought, 'how can we actually get the sago to cultivate if the KEK road has already destroyed all of our sago gardens?' I heard the government say that the tools are to help us economically but if the KEK road has cleared all of the sago gardens then we won't have any left to cultivate. The government heard my complaints, and they provided a solution which was to distribute seeds to grow more sago trees. So, some of the villagers joined the groups formed by the Industry Agency and were invited*

*to plant sago. But then we thought about how long it would be before we could cultivate and harvest the sago if we planted it today. Sago is not something that grows fast or provides produce quickly. Rather, it is a long-term plant. SG*

As well as threatening their livelihoods and food security, forced land acquisition has socio-cultural implications for indigenous women. Customary land upon which sago is cultivated has cultural significance for Moi communities and is connected to their identity as Papuans:

*A road for the Special Economic Zone has been developed around the sago gardens. Besides sago gardens, there is also customary land belonging to the Osok clan. This customary land is considered to be sacred by my family. In particular, it is where we find ingredients for ceremonies. When entering, there is a special area where you need to wait before harvesting sago. After a traditional ritual has been performed, then you can collect sago. SB*

*Because those are our biggest needs. The first are sago and land. When land is destroyed it means that we cannot survive from the produce which we cultivate. Like what the other women just said, women can only farm if there is available land. Land is like a mother which we must protect, it is what gives life to all people. So, I give the following example: we must be strong like the sago tree which has given us life year after year. This type of food is tough unlike other staples like rice. So, the symbol that most represents me is a strong tree like the strong sago trees which give life to all people. SA*

As well as giving rise to land-related issues, the Special Economic Zone has negatively impacted the surrounding marine environment and may lead to increased risk of flooding. This is particularly harmful for coastal communities whose lives depend on activities such as fishing and maintaining kelp gardens:

*Now the ships which dock here are cleaned and the oil is dumped into the sea in this front area. Because of this, all of the kelp has been affected and killed. Now if we want to grow more, we need to buy the seeds from Bacan, which is in Ternate. The first time we bought five tons, but the crop failed because we had to transport it so far and also because it was exposed to oil*

*and water pollution. So, all of the kelp that we bought that first time failed to grow. The second time around, we were able to buy over four tons by renting out a long boat for more than Rp20 million. Soon after planting it we were able to get some results, the Sorong Regent even did a big harvest. Our third time planting failed because it was exposed to pollution from the pioneer ships which are usually cleaned there, and which dump any rubbish or oil which might be on the ship into the sea. Kelp is no good if it is exposed to oil or filth so every day, we need to clean it. SF*

Although it was not discussed in detail with the women, the Special Economic Zone may also increase the risk of flooding for coastal communities such as Jeflio and Arar. In April 2019, homes, schools, and public infrastructure throughout Sorong was inundated with floodwater.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the research team had to travel through floodwaters that had engulfed the city of Sorong for several weeks. This was highlighted by RV, a male leader from Arar Village:

*This is the impact that will happen. It's like the area around Rufei Beach in Sorong City which is now facing impacts because of the reclamation of the Sorong City wall which is currently being worked on. The place that they lived in has been filled with water because of discharge from the reclamation process. Eventually the residents had to move because the water was coming into their homes even though it wasn't the rainy or flood season. So, these impacts are a lesson for Arar. If there are build ups or reclamations as part of the Special Economic Zone, Arar will certainly face increased runoff.*

## Women and the defense of customary land

For Moi communities in this part of Sorong, women have played a key role in the struggle to defend their customary land both through advocacy and direct action. The attitude of resistance that many women expressed is captured in the following statement by SA:

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<sup>21</sup> Ernes Broning Kakasina, 29 April 2019, "Banjir Rendam Sejumlah Kawasan di Sorong," *Antara News*, <[www.antaranews.com/berita/848857/banjir-rendam-sejumlah-kawasan-di-sorong](http://www.antaranews.com/berita/848857/banjir-rendam-sejumlah-kawasan-di-sorong)>.



*I want to keep providing women with an understanding of the sago gardens here because they are a place which provides food. Because of the development process, we also need to think. Instead of just going along with developmental considerations, we must remember to think before we act. Because regret doesn't come from the front, it always comes from behind. I always remind women that when all of the sago and all of the land is gone, where will our children find food?*

In recent years, significant areas of customary Moi land have been expropriated by the Sorong government, without the provision of adequate compensation. As one woman explained, when compensation is awarded, it is paid in instalments and does not cover all areas acquired:

*We heard about the Special Economic Zone, a large amount of our land had automatically been taken and only a part of it was left. The government has not paid us owners for that land. We as the traditional owners are thinking whether we will not experience the same thing as what has happened to the coastal area, where the regional government has made promises, but they have never paid. After a long time, the regional government only recently paid for the coastal area. However, the inland area where the Special Economic Zone is located hasn't been paid for despite there being gardens and villagers there ... The regional government has only ever made promises, but they never make payments in one transaction. Instead, they pay us using the system of instalment. This time, they will pay us again next year. However, when they wanted to take the land, we measured the land directly, and they took the entire area. They say that the land is now owned by the local government, but it has never been relinquished by the traditional owners.*  
SF

Two participants from Sorong explained, women have been at the forefront of this struggle to obtain adequate compensation from the regional government:

*My husband is a traditional landowner from the Kami clan. As one family, the Kami held a demonstration or blockade to ask for compensation for our customary land which had not been paid for. Instead, we were all taken and threatened at the police station. Everybody who participated in the demo, so every family member from the Kami including wives, siblings, and*

*even children were taken to the police station ... after that blockade, the regional government became aware and began the payment process. SE*

*When we carried out the blockade, all of us were taken to the police station. Women, men, children [were taken to the station]. Once we were there, the regional government also arrived and the Vice Regent said to the Police Chief, "Sir, the local government still owe the Kami Clan more than Rp4 million". So, I replied to the Vice Regent, "You speak to the officer who you ordered to come and take us away. Make sure you tell him about the debt you still owe us". After the blockade, the regional government arranged the compensation payments. However, the payment process did not account for all of the locations. For the community-owned farmlands, the regional government provided Rp500 million, but the treasurer did not distribute all of the money at that time. SF*

A similar account was provided by one of the women from the village of Jeflio who has a number of gardens in the Special Economic Zone as well as in an area included in the new Sorong airport:

*Before the road was built, we, the villagers, held a demonstration to be compensated for the farmlands which had been cleared. We were able to get Rp1 million and I asked one of the people at the Regent's office about the price for the farms for which I had only received Rp1 million. But there was no straight answer from the government officer.*

Through direct action, a group of women were successful in preventing the construction of a road on their customary land:

*I and two other women protested against the regional government to demand that our customary lands [area of sago gardens] should not be used to build a road for the Special Economic Zone ... after our action, there was an attempt by the Regent to find a solution. He made a verbal statement saying that our customary land would not be disturbed. But I'm concerned that after his period has finished my sago gardens can be taken. SB*

## SC's story of resistance

Another Moi woman who played a crucial role in protecting customary land in Sorong is SC. Despite the patriarchal rules of traditional land ownership, she has succeeded in becoming an indigenous Moi leader with the right to discuss issues relating to customary land. She has fought for the rights of Moi communities in Sorong City who are marginalized due to rapid development and urban change:

*I am SC from the Moi indigenous group. I graduated from the Theological College in Batu Malang. I am currently an active leader of 'Yayasan Kasih Agape Malainsimsa' and have been so since 2017. Before then, I was with 'Yayasan Doulos Jakarta'. As well as that, I am also active in the Indigenous Community Council in Malamoi. Early on, I was placed in the Women's Bureau, then I was moved to the Customary Rights Bureau. From there, I took up a position as the Secretary of LMA and now I am the Vice Chairperson. The traditional land of the Moi people stretches from Sorong City to South Sorong and Raja Ampat. It includes the northern region of Tambrauw, but the establishment of a new regency has created a boundary for Moi people. The boundaries of traditional land ownership should not be confined or shifted by administrative boundaries but that is what has now happened because it is part of the customary arrangement.*

*After I went in search of information, it turned out that there is a provision which states that women can also obtain land rights if their father does not have any sons or brothers. My father has had four wives. The first, second, and third did not have any children, I arrived once he had his fourth wife. So, after that, I had to fight on the side of customary law because of the outlook which exists in traditional Moi society towards women. It turned out that I had legitimacy according to customary law, but I had to pass through the traditional court in the forest.*

*Because of this process, plus the claims put forward by my cousin, the people who can enter the traditional court are those who wear traditional ornaments on their ears and noses or a Moi person who has already completed the customary education (kambik). Those are the people who process issues related to customary law and for my case they entered the forest at 10am*

*and came back out at 5pm. In completing this process, the indigenous leaders from two parties litigated. These leaders must have already completed the traditional education and they discuss the problems starting from our family trees.*

*This cousin, he is a son, but we do not know whether his parents had undergone a customary marriage or not ... for me, I am only a daughter, but I born from a relationship that had both a customary marriage and a church marriage. Apparently, this man, he was born outside the customary provisions. Thus, the customary verdict fell in my favor because although I am a woman, I was born within the customary order.*

*Moi women protect other basic rights, they defend the sago gardens. But in the Malanu region, the sago which we owned is now gone because there have been so many changes. For example, the sago which I used to have has disappeared because the area is now part of the city. In the past, in order to send their children to school, Moi women would have to harvest the sago and take it to the city via Makbon, but now that land has been sold off and developed. I owned that land, but other clans sold it. There are quite a lot of internal challenges for us in which different clans make claims and then release the land to other people.*

*Considering this problem of traditional land ownership, I feel it is so important to protect Moi traditions and customs. Thus, I took the initiative of creating a map of customary land in Sorong City. The increased diversity and development of Sorong City has meant that people think that Moi communities no longer exist within the city. There are 21 clans in Sorong City but only seven in the central area. I started with these seven clans. By recording and creating boundaries, I was able to create a map of the seven clans in Sorong City which was approved by representatives from each clan.*

*The issue of land being sold by other clans is caused by economic factors, the result of the loss of sago farms. In the past, the sago trees would be cut up and tapped, then put into a basket and taken to the market to be sold to buy fish and rice. But not anymore, there is no more sago. They don't know how to make a garden and because the city is so developed, they go there. People come in search of land because they can't really live in the sky,*



*or between the earth and the sky, they have to live on land. The only places left is small and has only a few remaining sago trees.*

*The key word is that the sago gardens are gone, our ancestral land has gradually gone. Who sold it? Our brothers and sisters sold it. I come and see all of this and try to save our customary land. But my life is threatened by security forces who wear black clothes with hidden pistols. Nevertheless, the map of the seven clans in Sorong City is now finished and has been signed by the seven clans in front of a notary. The seven clans are: Malibela Klawalu, Kalagison Milo/Kalagison Kabandulu, Mobalus and Kalawaisa, Osok Malaimsimsa, Kalami Kalagus, Bewela, Malaseme Klaibin. Surrounding clans are: Malaseme Klaum, Malibela Klaifi, Malibela Ginala and others.*

*After pushing for these seven clans, I have also pushed for other Moi clans. Because these clans need to know about their history and about Moi historical stories, there needs to be a single document. So, I'm moving forward with these 13 other clans. The time I need to finish a map of land boundaries for the seven clans plus these 13 other clans is one year and four months. Once that happens, we will take it to the local government so that they understand and accept a foundation which is based on indigenous communities. We won't use the government's map; we will have our own map as indigenous people.*

*In my opinion, a nation which can protect itself is one which defends its land. That is the way that we give thanks to God. People who have issues around land boundaries often come to me with questions. I am able to give them answers because I already know the boundaries of customary land. I just introduce them to whichever clan is the traditional owners of that specific location.*

## **Intimidation faced by indigenous women in Sorong**

Due to their involvement in the struggle to defend customary Moi land, indigenous women in Sorong have been the target of intimidation and threats of violence:

*Yeah, when I defend the sago gardens that my family owns, I experience intimidation. SB*

*I have experienced terror because I am so committed to protecting my sago gardens ... But normally if somebody wishes misfortune on me, they will themselves be punished. For example, they will be chased by a snake, something will definitely happen to them. So, it is solved through natural means because I live in the natural world and communicate with nature. SA*

*It has happened so many times that I forget. My family has had to protect me because of direct intimidation. They hold up vehicles and come to my house. At this point, I have endured so many threats, terror and vehicle hold-ups that the Chief of Resort Police has told me that I'm not allowed to stand and speak beside the road because it is so dangerous. SC*

# Our Findings and A Way Forward





A woman processes sago, a staple food and symbol chosen by many women in this study.  
Photo by Albertus Vembrianto.





10

A philosophy of land:  
mother giving life,  
not empty land



What did we discover after sitting down with 100 indigenous women, listening to their stories, disappointments and aspirations? This chapter outlines key findings based on the patterns we discovered and presents recommendations to governments and the international community, as well as researchers, donors, advocacy groups, and other civil society actors.<sup>1</sup>

Our research was not intended to be quantitative, nor was the sample selected randomly. Our concern was to amplify the voices of women impacted by natural resource conflict. We asked researchers and survivors to find women close to them, with similar experiences of forest dispossession and impunity. Facilitators used guidelines to collect qualitative information. Participants were encouraged to share information they were comfortable with. Despite these limitations, clear patterns emerged, allowing us to identify some key findings from information provided.

Listening to 100 indigenous women speak about their lives and their connection to the land, it is clear that natural resources are central. For indigenous women, the critical factor is land. Land is important to indigenous Papuans, because land has a very deep philosophical meaning. Papuans say, *‘land is the mother who gives life.’*

When we talk about land, indigenous peoples, and the state, we see there is a clash of world views. A powerful state feels that in the name of national interest, and in the name of development, ownership of indigenous land can be transferred, but for indigenous Papuans there is not an inch of land that does not have customary ownership. Every piece of land is owned.

There is a contestation. On the one hand, indigenous people want to assert their identity over their land, while on the other, the state claims that it has the prerogative to determine how that land is used. Land is on offer as a commodity, valued for money, no longer viewed ‘as the mother who gives life’.

Listening to indigenous people is the best way to avoid conflict. Conflict over natural resources will continue if we do not listen to the voices of indigenous women. As advocates for indigenous peoples’ rights, the link

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on an interview with PWG member Frida Kelasin, at a research workshop held in February 2020.

between women and natural resource is critical. We must place women and indigenous peoples as subjects in the national management of land use, without leaving behind the values of human dignity. When this happens, development can take place.

Development should humanize people, including indigenous peoples who may carry the state on their shoulders. It will be extraordinary if these values are used in a strategic way by both the state and indigenous peoples, sitting down together, including men and women, to make decisions relating to land.

## **Not empty land**

An indigenous person is a citizen, not someone from outside. Indigenous people are part of this country, they must be heard. Patterns of land-grabbing are happening in many places in the name of development. The state sees an area of land that perceives as empty and determines that it is empty land.

Yet for us, all land is owned. Therefore, the pattern of land grabbing using undemocratic means, without involving the community in a participatory manner, without hearing our grievances, must cease. Indigenous communities should be involved from the start, when land use planning is taking place – whether it is oil palm plantations, expanding development projects like oil and gas, or establishing new administrative units.

Everything related to land should involve indigenous communities from the start. Where indigenous communities live cannot be exchanged, for example the indigenous people of Kebar cannot be moved to live in another area, even though the area is within boundaries of an administrative unit: “This is our land. Our land borders with these families, these clans.”

A pattern of development without involving indigenous people has repeatedly taken place and must cease. Best-practice mechanisms must be in place when land is being negotiated.

## Our identity is our land: sacred sites of indigenous knowledge

We learned three important lessons about indigenous women's identities. First, if indigenous women no longer have land, they can no longer be called "indigenous." Land and clan are one and the same. Second, indigenous women say that their land and forest are their 'supermarkets,' their living pharmacies, their storehouses. Third, everything in nature has a name: every tree, every bird has a name. Nature has many tasks: birds can convey messages to people. A bird may tell the time of high tide, the time water will recede, or that a trap has caught something. A bird can tell there will be guests coming. This reading of nature is understood by indigenous people. They read nature by looking at the stars, they predict the direction of the wind by looking the clouds.

100 indigenous women from five districts chose symbols to represent themselves. Each woman chose a symbol that shared knowledge of indigenous crafts, like a traditional woven bag, a waterproof mat, medicinal grass used to boost fertility, or natural surroundings, like a sago tree, a bend in a river, or a mountain range, all illustrating their deep connection to nature.

## Our origin story, indigenous power & topography

Each tribe has a sacred place. This is where they come from, and where they return after death. They see signs, for example if a family member dies, they receive a sign despite being separated by long distance. There are sacred places for all indigenous people known only by each tribe, and rarely understood by outsiders.

Each tribe has a story of origin. They have a story about the first time they were introduced to sago as food, fire as a tool, or utensils for cooking. Each tribe has myths and stories, for example how sago grew, or how fire was introduced. Some tribes speak of a higher power with a different name for each tribe responsible for dividing tribes into clans and land into customary territories. Sometimes stories of origin are told in traditional houses with



messages from ancestors to younger generations. Messages to do with protecting the land and survival.

Our research affirmed that we learn about borders from our parents. Stories are told while walking in the forest. We are taken to the places of our ancestors. “Starting from the mountain vein follow the river until you reach the estuary.” The boundary might be a stone, a large tree, a brook, or a river, or it may be a sago garden.

Large-scale plantations fell forests and eliminate boundaries causing conflict with the indigenous people. The boundaries are rarely written, but rather exist as oral history passed down through the generations. The word of the ancestors is believed to be true, and this has prevented land disputes in the past. The power of indigenous people is the strength of their memories and their wisdom passed down through oral topography.

## Boundary disputes caused by external intervention

Boundary disputes usually occur only when third parties are involved, and do not consult communities or involve vested interests. This is the root cause of land conflict, as indigenous land boundaries are not permanent, but are based on nature.

Conflict between communities over boundaries is very rare. When people hunt in the forest, they do so within their customary boundaries. If the animal enters into the territory of another clan and is killed there, the hunters will share the meat with their neighbors. These values of solidarity and tolerance are very strong and held dearly, especially in relation to natural resource management.

## Issuing permits, only looking from above

*Para-para* is a customary mechanism for dialog that is well known to indigenous peoples in Papua. The process of issuing permits must use mechanisms that are familiar to indigenous people. However, from indigenous women’s experiences, permits are granted based on desk assessments of large tracts

of land. This means that the people who now know how to use technology and computers can see the land on a large scale, and know what is on the land. They forget that for Papuans, land is not just what is on the surface. For Papuans, land ownership includes the surface but also what is in the bowels of the earth.

From our research, we can see that a battle has taken place between indigenous people and vested parties as a result of government policies. A contestation takes place when ownership is weakened or shaken in various ways. Often, this escalates into a conflict with the community becoming less cohesive and more divided. Those issuing permits forget that for Papuans, every single thing in the forest, across these wide expanses of forest—each animal, tree, plant, mountain vein, brook, river, ancestral site—has a name. Many of these also signify boundaries.

Many of the permits that have been issued in the five areas of our research did not genuinely involve the community. If we look at ownership, indigenous peoples must be recognized by the state as owners of indigenous land. If a permit is issued without involving all indigenous men and women (and not just some men), then it is a mistake. It is a violation.

## **An alternative approach to development: from careless extraction to dignity for indigenous people**

In Papua, indigenous people are not narrowminded with a such an exclusive worldview that they reject development. However, the reality is that despite various projects that have extracted natural resources of wood, oil and gas, minerals, etc., indigenous people are not becoming prosperous. In the areas where gold, oil and gas are mined, indigenous people live in pockets of poverty.

Extractions destroy the indigenous people's philosophy of land as life-giving mother and strips naked the concept of living together as equal citizens. State policies have not brought prosperity and well-being to indigenous people. This has caused pain. Indigenous women are hurt when their forests,

mountains, and seas are destroyed and they become mere spectators who receive no benefits.

What the indigenous women of Papua seek is not compensation but rather as acknowledgment for what has been given and a commitment to ensure the well-being of indigenous people. How do Papuans measure well-being? Indigenous people feel good when their customary territory is not disturbed. “If you want to enter, you must ask for permission.” If there is no acknowledgment, no requests for permission to enter the land, from the beginning, then indigenous people feel they are not seen, their existence is not acknowledged. They feel as if they are here, but not here. This must not be repeated.

## **Towards acknowledgment: involving indigenous women**

In our discussions with indigenous women, we see again and again how the release of land for large-scale use has not involved indigenous people in a genuine way. Indigenous men and women are still not heard despite the fact that there are customary mechanisms for communal discussion of crucial matters, including land use. Papuans are being plundered by their own state. This situation cannot be tolerated. A joint mechanism must be considered whereby the state can hear and listen to the voices of indigenous peoples.

Everywhere Papuan women are talking about land. “This is our land. Why is there this kind of treatment? Why won’t you listen to us?” By listening to the voices of 100 indigenous women, fired up by threats to their land, forest, and survival, collective vision for change was created. The *first* thing needed is the common acknowledgement that indigenous people are the rightful owners of indigenous land and natural resources. The *second* thing is to facilitate a space for indigenous people to enter into a dialog among themselves. Later, they can convey their decisions about what can and cannot be taken, and what they think should be given as evidence that their rights have been acknowledged. If compensation is required, then it is not given to one person for their own benefit but shared collectively with relevant clans. A good mechanism for land negotiation must ensure recognition of

indigenous people's rights, facilitate genuine dialog and reflect the Papuan meaning and philosophy of land.

Papuan women do not only see the land and forest as dirt and trees. They see all the different types of native trees; the number of sago trees; different kinds of native birds—birds of paradise, *Maleo*, and others; and the native plants, including medicinal plants. All of this is the mother who gives life. Indigenous people always see the forest as a holistic organism; life and environment are like two sides of the same coin. Thus, we return to the view held by indigenous women that the land, forests, and humans are inseparable, that human survival and the sustainability of forest are one of the same.







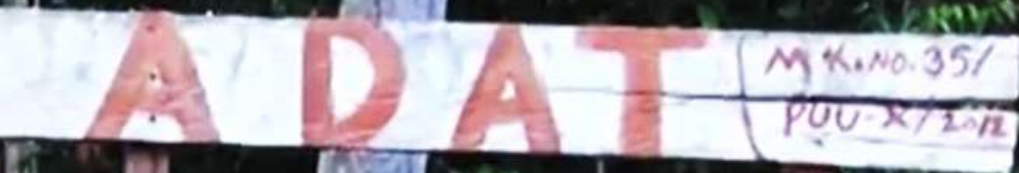
Sign reading 'Customary Land' planted by the indigneous community in Boven Digoel.  
Photo by AJAR/PWG team, late 2019.



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## Key findings



Key findings from five case studies can be grouped into five broad categories (i) the deep ties between indigenous women and their traditional lands; (ii) vulnerabilities and social problems of Papuan women; (iii) incursions of corporations onto traditional lands; (iv) impacts of this corporate activity on the natural world; and (v) the response of indigenous women to threats.

## Relationship between indigenous women and their traditional territories

Forests under traditional claim are the primary source of subsistence and livelihood for indigenous communities in all of the five research areas. This has been the case for generations. Indigenous women rely on customary forests for their staple foods, such as sago gardens and other edible plants like *genemo* and *matoa* leaves. They use forests to cultivate gardens, hunt, and collect forest products for consumption and sale, including the small-scale sale of timber and river stones.

The forest is the source of knowledge for indigenous women. In Boven Digoel, for example, the proximity of communities to their forest has fostered women's use of natural signs to choose the best time to plant, or locate their gardens. This knowledge has been passed down through generations. In Kebar, indigenous knowledge includes the use of traditional forest medicines essential for the community's health.

The close relationship between indigenous women and the forest is reflected in the centrality of forests to identity and how women view the world. For the women, their relationship with forests is so intimate that they refer to forests as their mother, the source of all life, that provides for all their needs. Forests are the organizing pillar of Papuan women's worldview and philosophy. An illustration of this was when, during the course of the research, women were asked to choose symbols to represent themselves. 78 women chose either a symbol from the forest, like sago, rivers, and trees, or a traditional handicraft made from forest products, like woven bags or mats.

Although they emphasized the centrality of forests in their lives, the women noted the weakness of their rights to land and resources in traditional



law, and the discrimination against women in traditional institutions and land management. In some communities, such as Unurum Guay, women's rights are limited to cultivating gardens. They do not have ownership rights and are unable to participate in decision-making or to receive compensation when their land is sold. In addition, the inherited rights to land use by female descendants is limited and may not exceed the rights of male descendants.

Informants from Boven Digoel, Kebar, and Sorong noted that although women's rights are stronger in theory than those in Unurum Guay, they are still weak in practice. Even though women in these communities hold ownership rights, they are not involved in the decision-making over matters of indigenous land because women are not permitted to learn about customary institutions or the location of boundaries of customary territories. This discrimination by traditional institutions is replicated by the companies, who exclude women from land negotiations.

All of the case studies demonstrated that the position of Papuan women becomes weaker once she marries and leaves her customary territory. Women may not hold ownership rights over traditional land outside of their home communities and are not consulted in matters of land. If a woman's husband dies, her husband's family may override a widow's rights at any time, and her children's right to inherit the land. A widow may be left with no land rights at all.

Although women's rights over traditional land and forest is weak, they are resourceful in devising additional or alternative means for supporting themselves and their families. Some women open small kiosks, or become wage employees with the local government, health posts, churches, or schools. In Boven Digoel and Fakfak, where palm oil plantations have encroached on traditional territories, some women have become day laborers on the plantations.

Five women in the study relied exclusively on their gardens for subsistence, while 85 women relied on gardening as well as other sources of livelihood. Only two participants did not rely at all on forest gardens. The majority of women, therefore, continue to be vulnerable to companies encroaching on their land and forests.

## Vulnerabilities of Papuan women

The most significant problem raised by the women was lack of education. The majority of women had no more than grade school education and, as a result, had difficulty finding stable employment with adequate wages. 34 participants had either no school or only primary education. Only 19 participants reached senior high school. The reasons for not completing their studies varied, including lack of school fees or available teachers, or parents who did not agree to educating of their daughters and because of domestic needs like housework and care for children and the elderly. Some women left school because they became pregnant and were forced into early marriage.

Underage marriage is common. Some women in Unurum Guay said it was common for parents to force their school-age daughters into marriage, or for girls themselves to use marriage as a self-protection strategy if their parents died. Current national law requires the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years. 21 participants married before they were 18, and 8 of married before there were even 16 years old.

Papuan women suffer when they and their family do not have access to adequate health care, and experience serious illness and premature death. This is a widespread problem. Almost a third of participants reported that they had a child who died, and 49 participants reported that their parents or husbands had died young, as a result of illness. (Note: child mortality rates are not reported at the province level, only at the national level, so it is difficult to put data into a broader context.)

Under educated, with no land rights, and married off at a young age, Papuan women are vulnerable to violence and abuse. 23 participants reported being victims of domestic violence, whether by their husbands, or family members. Alcohol consumption and financial difficulties were the main causes, but some women reported violence from their husband's family if they could not give birth.

Women are at increased risk of gender-based violence from the migrant community, from the military, and from private security forces. Of the 100 women who participated in this research, 49 have experienced violence.

This includes domestic violence (23 participants) as well as violence between community members outside the home (7), and violence perpetrated by state actors or security personnel from the companies (19).

## **Presence of corporations on traditional lands**

The research documents the widespread loss of indigenous land and forests to corporations, especially plantations. The expansion of oil palm plantations in Jayapura, Fakfak, Boven Digoel, and Tambrau has been characterized by opaque and deceitful behavior by companies. Women reported a pattern of unfulfilled promises, like the provision of improved housing and clean water, or support for education, all used to lure clan leaders into land agreements. Even when promises are kept, they are often only partially delivered, like the promise of school scholarships in Boven Digoel, only made available to male students.

Another tactic is the companies' use of small up front "good faith" payments to clan leaders. These payments are later used by companies as evidence of community agreement to land sales. Because of traditional institutions for decision-making processes about land, companies often target clan leaders for untransparent deals. These "divide and rule" tactics sometimes involve taking clan leaders on "study tours" to other plantation sites, which in effect separates leaders from their communities and makes them more vulnerable to coercion. In Sorong, women reported that companies worked together with local government to seize Moi customary land for the Exclusive Economic Zone. Compensation payments were either not made at all, or grossly inadequate.

Women's ownership of land, the value of natural resources to their livelihoods, social networks, and their very identity, has been systematically ignored by the Indonesian state and corporations alike, from Dutch colonial times, to the New Order, and to Special Autonomy. The act of sweeping aside indigenous rights in order to secure access to valuable natural resources has brought increasing militarization to Papua. Tight military control of resource rich areas as "national assets", the use of police and military as

company security, and the involvement of military as beneficiaries in the extraction business, has resulted in decades of violence and the repression of Papuans by Indonesian security forces.

Women have borne an especially heavy burden. In Jayapura and Boven Digoel, the use of military as company security is especially prevalent, while in Fakfak and Unurum Guay the police provide private security for corporations and suppress dissent related to land grabbing. For example, in Sorong, the police arrested community members who blocked the road on their customary land that was being taken by the local government.

## **Impact of corporations' presence on natural resources**

The seizure of traditional land and the conversion of forests to monocultures has had wide ranging and lasting negative impacts. The most obvious is on the natural environment. Deforestation has had a devastating effect through the loss of ecosystems resulting in the loss of clean water, soil fertility, protection from natural disasters like flooding and landslides, and the maintenance of biodiversity, including fish, animal, and plant species used by local communities. Staple foods, like sago, central to the Papuan diet and culture, is increasingly difficult to find. Women from Fakfak, Boven Digoel, Tambrau, and Sorong reported increasingly polluted waters that kill fish and aquatic plants important to local diets. In Kebar Valley, Sorong, and Unurum Guay, residents live in fear of increased flooding as a result of the loss of their forests.

The impact of land grabbing and loss of traditional land and forests has also been social. The increasing tide of transmigration as a source of cheap labor has been an important factor in the rise of plantations in Papua. A census in 2010 showed that Javanese are now the largest ethnic group in Sorong. Many participants complained that their traditional land was seized without compensation for official transmigration programs, for example in Fakfak. In Kebar, women reported that informal migrants came and took land without permission. With racism and religious discrimination from the Javanese, largely Muslim, population, there is a rise in inter-ethnic tensions



as Papuans feel excluded from job and education opportunities that come with development funds and corporate investment.

Some impacts of forest loss are felt by indigenous men and women alike. The community as a whole suffers from the loss of identity associated with ties to land, forests, and traditional livelihoods and knowledge. Indigenous people have all suffered from the increase in conflict of various kinds that have accompanied the rise of plantations. For example, land sales to corporations have caused inter-clan conflict, as the borders between neighboring territories and questions of compensation are hotly contested. Conflicts within clans and even families have also risen due to members selling land without agreement or of other rightsholders. Forests act as places of refuge from violence, during military operations.

Loss of forests has serious health impacts from loss of medicinal plants (especially with little access to modern health care), altered diet (increased dependence on packaged food and vulnerability to food shortages), increased exposure to hazardous working conditions (agricultural chemicals, mining and timber accidents).

Although many of negative impacts affect all indigenous peoples, it is women who bear the brunt of these changes, both natural and social. Although corporations have brought job opportunities and access to cash for some, women have fewer wage employment opportunities than men, especially in timber mining, and oil and gas. Women have less access to education needed to prepare them for skilled positions in resource extraction industries.

Women have less access to jobs that come from the conversion of forests, and they are more dependent on forests that are lost. Forests provide emergency sources of food during “lean” periods, and forest products can be sold to generate cash. The loss of forests has meant a loss of food security for women as the primary provider of food for the family. Housework and gardening usually fall to women and girls, especially as wage labor pulls men away from these tasks. It is women who must travel further and further to garden, to fetch clean water, and to collect the forest products they need for daily life.

Because they are more likely to get wage labor, men are more likely to have increased access to cash when forests are converted. Male family members

control any compensation payments from selling jointly owned land, even property owned by women. Male elites are better positioned to obtain payments from government and corporations. This increased access to cash through employment and development funds means an increase in alcohol abuse by men. The low status of women in Papuan society means women are vulnerable to increased domestic violence due to men's loss of forest-based livelihoods and increased consumption of alcohol. Women's vulnerability means they are subjected to sexual exploitation or harassment by migrant workers or in the workplace.

Not all impacts of the corporate presence have been negative. Some women, such as those from Tomage, felt that although they mourned the loss of traditional livelihoods and worried about the impact on their health from exposure to agricultural chemicals, they had increased independence through their access to cash from wage employment as day laborers on plantations. In some cases, corporations have taken the place of the failed Indonesian state by improving local roads and providing essential services such as hospitals and schools. However, the women who expressed an improvement in their lives were in the minority.

## **The response and resilience of indigenous women**

The research demonstrates the bravery and resilience of women in meeting these challenges. They have acted courageously to fight for their personal rights, while acting as leaders in their communities. Their actions have increased public awareness, at the local, national, and international levels, on issues faced by indigenous peoples, leading to alliances and joint campaigns. Indigenous resistance has succeeded in limiting, to some extent, land-grabbing by companies, preventing them from freely expanding their operations.

Women's persistent efforts to speak out in discussions about their customary lands was well documented. Several women in Unurum Guay lobbied to participate in discussions about customary land by (i) citing provincial laws on equal rights between men and women, (ii) voicing the negative impact of selling customary land on their children and grandchildren, or (iii) using

their position in traditional legal institutions (*adat*) to claim the right to participate actively. This strategy succeeded in providing space for women to directly influence the outcome of *adat* discussions.

Since the start, women in Kebar have been involved in efforts by the Mpur to resist the presence of the company. They have spoken loudly, advocating at the national level. Kebar women have returned the token cash payment given by the company. In September 2015, four of the six Mpur clans in the Kebar Valley returned these funds. As a result, the company has only been able to operate on the customary land of the two clans who did not return the money. This strong resistance forced PT. BAPP to change from oil palm to a corn plantation. Indigenous communities successfully convinced the provincial parliament of West Papua to form a special committee to look into the legitimacy of PT. BAPP in Kebar.

Participants from the Kami clan in Sorong adopted a similar strategy by holding demonstrations demanding their rights from the local government, even though they faced the risk of arrest. Women from the clan argued with the police and officials, voicing the injustice they experienced. As a result, the local government in Sorong has begun to pay compensation for the customary land of the Kami clan taken for the Special Economic Zone. Women took part in the community action in Boven Digoel to try to reclaim their territory by using the customary practice of *sasi adat*, which involves marking an area with a symbol (in this case, a cross) to indicate it should not be entered under penalty of sanction under traditional law.

Indigenous women have played a key role in building alliances with others to strengthen their voice in articulating injustices they experience and to support their demands to protect their customary rights. The Mpur have worked closely with the Protestant church, advocating for their rights to the local government. In December 2017, they succeeded in persuading the church to write a letter to the Tambrauw Regent following his refusal to stand up to the company. In November 2018, the provincial parliament formed a special committee to investigate their case. At the national level, the Mpur collaborated with human rights NGOs, like PUSAKA, Greenpeace, JERAT Papua, and AJAR, to document their case and advocate directly with

state institutions in Jakarta. These strategies have succeeded in attracting the attention of local and international media.

Indigenous women in Boven Digoel collaborated with one of the church leaders in the area to hold commemorate events at locations that have special significance to the community, such as the location of the first baptism. They succeeded in affirming their cultural identity, reclaiming their history, and demonstrating to the company that they have rights to their land through those traditional events. The use of *sasi* succeeded in uniting indigenous peoples in the region to fight land grabbing and environmental damage. The *sasi* strategy sent a strong message to companies about the customary sanctions they will face if they insist on breaking the traditional boundaries marked with the *sasi* cross.

Individual women have acted bravely taking leadership and defending their interests. One woman in particular, Mama SC in Sorong, used both the Indonesian and traditional justice systems to win the right to her indigenous land. Using customary law, she asserted her claim as a daughter to inherit land against the claims of a male cousin. This effort was effective because the *adat* council decided that Mama SC had full rights to her family's customary land. Even though she is a woman, the council granted her rights because she was born from a marriage conducted under their custom and religion. This decision is binding in their indigenous community.

Mama SC participated in efforts to map her land with other indigenous peoples, to protect their customary rights to land. With the aim of obtaining legal recognition of customary land and the rights of indigenous peoples, this strategy has become increasingly relevant since the 2012 Indonesian Constitutional Court ruling that customary forests are not state forests.

There were challenges, including the detention of indigenous people in Sorong during a demonstration demanding that local government pay compensation for customary land. In August 2018, members of the Kebar community were beaten by police when they demonstrated. The recommendation of the provincial parliament's special committee that PT. BAPP should return customary land to the community has not been implemented to date. PT. BAPP continues to hold a legal permit issued by the Ministry of Forestry in 2014 and has since obtained approval for extension



from the local government. This national permit makes it difficult to implement the recommendations of the local parliament's special committee, because the national and local governments would have to pay compensation for the cancellation of PT. BAPP's operating license. This illustrates the failed promises of Special Autonomy to deliver more autonomy over local affairs.



Indigenous women reading out their declaration against PT. BAPP in Kebar.  
Photo by AJAR/PWG team, February 2020.



## A way forward: recommendations





The findings of this study indicate that indigenous women must be involved in decisions and discussions around land, forests and natural resources in Papua. Women have managed to survive drastic changes through resilience and creativity, but time is running out to enact changes that can protect their survival into the future. After listening to the voices of indigenous women facing dispossession, **10 key recommendations** were formulated:

1. **The National Government** should undertake a thorough assessment of **Special Autonomy based on open dialog with indigenous Papuan communities, placing indigenous women at the center. This evaluation should focus on natural resource policies and practices**, including long-term sustainability. An honest review must be undertaken rather than rolling over an unchanged Special Autonomy agreement. This assessment should include:
  - Crafting a new vision for the protection of land and forests in Papua, based on sustainable, community-led development models, with indigenous women playing a central role in articulating and implementing this alternative paradigm;
  - Reviewing the distribution of Special Autonomy funds to ensure that they are used effectively, targeted at improving the welfare of all indigenous Papuans, rather than merely a handful of local elites. A credible and transparent mechanism is needed to oversee the distribution of Special Autonomy funds;
  - Agreeing that if the Department of Internal Affairs does not formally enact bills passed by Papuan Parliaments after a set time period, they will come into legal effect by default.
2. **National Parliament** should pass legislation to enact the directive of the 2012 Constitutional Court decision (TAP MK 35/PUU-X/2012) providing direction for how customary territory can be registered and removed from the national Forest Estate. Such a registration process should not be overly onerous in time or resources required by applicants.
3. **The Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the Ministry of Agriculture** should undergo a transparent review of all existing permits and revoke



those over land that is claimed by indigenous communities where companies have failed to seek the consent and/or provide fair compensation to the true owners (including failure to comply with promised community benefits). In particular, the failure of PT. BAPP to comply with these regulations must be reviewed and its permit revoked if necessary, as recommended by the provincial parliament in West Papua.

4. Following its national inquiry on indigenous people, the **National Human Rights Commission or Komnas HAM**, should establish a follow-up inquiry involving the Papuan government and indigenous Papuan communities, including women, to **look at the role and impact of security forces in natural resource conflict in Papua**. Komnas HAM must take immediate action ensuring that the national government:
  - Ceases to use military as private security for plantations or other extraction operations;
  - Cease and sanction individual military or police officers who benefit from the resource business. Security force budgets should be transparently set by central and local governments, and should not rely on payments from corporations for their operations;
  - Support the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Human Rights Court, as agreed in the 2011 Special Autonomy Law.
5. **The National Commission on Violence Against Women or Komnas Perempuan** should ensure that regular human rights reports incorporate specific assessments of the situation of indigenous Papuan women, including their status within traditional institutions, recognition of their indigenous land rights, and their involvement in decision-making on traditional land and forest issues. Komnas Perempuan should play a role in advocating for the interests of women in land and resource disputes that require engagement of national agencies (such as the Ministry of Agriculture or Environment and Forestry), including in negotiations regarding Special Autonomy and in facilitating implementation of the recommendation of this report. Working with diverse groups of Papuan-led civil society, Komnas Perempuan should put in place long-term strategies to:

- Facilitate and provide support for women-led NGOs in human rights training for local indigenous communities;
- Provide channels for reporting cases of violence against women and accessing victim support;
- Develop culturally-sensitive community-based social services and awareness campaigns to empower women and girls, counseling and referrals for specific approaches to deal with alcoholism;
- Work to fulfill the rights of all children to an education by ensuring learning opportunities for girls.

6. **National and Provincial Governments** should:

- End the practice of establishing new Regencies and districts (“*pemekaran*”) and transparently review the impact and actual need for such divisions;
- Prioritize genuine efforts to recognize, respect, and protect the land rights of indigenous communities, as required by Papua’s Special Autonomy Law. This includes passing and implementing various local regulations on indigenous land rights, using participatory land mapping involving both indigenous women and men, and not extending operational permits of corporations operating on customary land without the consent of, or compensation to, traditional owners.

7. **Natural Resource Companies** must respect the land and resource rights of indigenous people, and in cases where they have taken land, ensure compensation payments are made transparently to the rightful owners. They must:

- Fulfill all promises made to communities as part of land use agreements;
- Ensure that women have equal access to promised benefits, such as employment opportunities, education, and scholarships;
- Cease using government security forces as private security;
- Ensure worker rights are protected, including protective gear and training in the use of dangerous chemicals and equipment;
- Ensure children of school age are not employed.

8. **Traditional institutions and leaders** should work to improve participation of women in *adat* education, in particular the recognition of women's *adat* land rights. They must raise awareness about the problem of domestic violence and use *adat* sanctions to prevent violence and punish offenders.
9. **Religious institutions and the churches** should continue to advocate for the rights of indigenous communities by:
  - Raising awareness among parishioners about violence against women, and offer support and refuge to victims of domestic violence;
  - Raising awareness about the dangers of alcoholism and offer addiction support;
  - Working to increase the involvement of women in leadership roles in the church and in their communities.
10. **Civil society groups** should expand their work with indigenous communities and relevant government agencies to map traditional territorial boundaries, involving women in the process, including:
  - Assisting indigenous women in petitioning the government for formal recognition of their forests and their removal from the Forest Estate;
  - Developing special programs to empower indigenous women, strengthening their engagement in *adat* council discussions, and advocating for their rights to land and forests;
  - Bringing additional resources to support advocacy efforts of communities in conflict with corporations to resolve disputes and, if they cannot, take them to higher levels of government or the courts;
  - Networking with other NGOs to assist with monitoring of corporate behavior. This includes working with international NGOs in consumer countries, particularly where import restrictions are in place against products at risk of being produced in violation of the law.





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# Postscript:

## Listening to Indigenous Women's Voices, a Key to Our Common Survival During This Pandemic



Fighting for Papuan women's rights in a time of COVID-19.

Photo by AJAR/PWG team, 2020.

As Indonesia's economic growth plunges to minus 5% by the end of 2020 – its worst performance in two decades, we must give pause to the economic development model we have relentlessly pursued. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted our world just as we completed our field research and has shown that the planet (and our islands) can no longer sustain the squandering of precious natural resources with little concern for the social and environmental impacts. As in the Asian economic crisis of 1998, and the global economic slow-down of 2008, the decline caused by the 2020 pandemic once again shows that the Indonesian government's addiction to economic growth has led to the wasteful destruction of our natural resources, compromised our food security, and pushed indigenous communities to the brink of extinction. Those who have managed to maintain access to their traditional forest livelihoods are better protected from these economic declines, increasing food prices, and loss of wage labor. But those who have not, like the women in our research, who have been pushed off their land with no safety net, once again find themselves at the pinch-point of these pressures.

During our field research, the indigenous women of Mpur, dressed in their traditional clothes, performed a dance where they read out a declaration:

*We, the women of Mpur, feel lost and without hope when our forest, where we plant our gardens, gather and hunt for food, is taken away. Land and forest are our precious treasure. Without the (palm oil) company, we can live. But we cannot live without our land and forest — our mother.*

*We, the women of Mpur, depend heavily on forests and land, as our source of food and drink for the survival of the Mpur indigenous people.*

*We, the women of Mpur, hope that the government will present to protect our rights and property. In contrast, the government has given our rights and property to the Company without considering our relationship to the forests and land ....*

Across the five areas of our research, the social and environmental impact of large-scale land acquisition has been severe: frequent floods, water shortages and pollution, food insecurity, the loss of flora, fauna and livelihoods, as well as the erosion of traditional knowledge and cultural meaning. The

survival of the indigenous way of life is at stake as well as the environmental health of us all.

Indigenous women in Papua are the protectors and the keepers of the forest. It is their task to bring food and water to the table. They know about the medicinal properties of plants and the significant cultural sites for their communities. In many cases, they are left out of negotiations around natural resources — their voices left unheard.

During our research, we have documented how development projects, given permits by the central government and facilitated by local authorities without regard for local communities and local impacts, have devastated a way of life that for generations has sustained communities and local environments. These projects enriched a few and impoverish many. Indigenous people, and women in particular, have not enjoyed the promised development benefits that were promised in exchange for loss of their land and forests.

One woman from Kebar stated:

*If we give our land to the palm oil companies, where will we live? Where can we plant our garden? There will be nowhere to go.*

Another woman added:

*The forest is where we seek [life]. We live here, ourselves and our descendants. If our forest is not destroyed by this company, we will never want for anything. But if the company comes in and destroys our forest, then the fish in our rivers will be extinct ... I have no idea about the future.*

And yet, women also need to be heard within their own indigenous communities:

*Women have the right to discuss and defend something. But sometimes we are not considered, maybe [they] feel that we are not capable or don't know how to even though we do ... As indigenous women, we have specific rights. We as women have 10 basic rights where we must also be involved in governance and customs. All this time, I have paid attention that men always lead when we want to achieve something. Women are not involved enough yet.*

Our time with the women in these communities has demonstrated clearly that Papua is not “empty land” and the women who live in and depend on these precious forests have rights – both as indigenous people and as citizens. As we conclude our research, we are even more convinced of the urgency to listen to the voices of indigenous women as they demand that their rights and their humanity be recognized: their rights of traditional land ownership and to practice their traditional livelihoods, to food security, to be consulted in the use of the land and be compensated when they consent to its use, to participate in their own indigenous institutions, to have equal access to government health and education services, to have political voice, to be protected from violence, and to live with dignity.





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